Horror in Culture & Entertainment

RUE MORGUE



FRENCH GORE INVADES NORTH AMERICA

INSIDE

FRONTIER(S) *Plus:* FRIGHTS FROM FRANCE

Dario Argento's
MOTHER OF TEARS

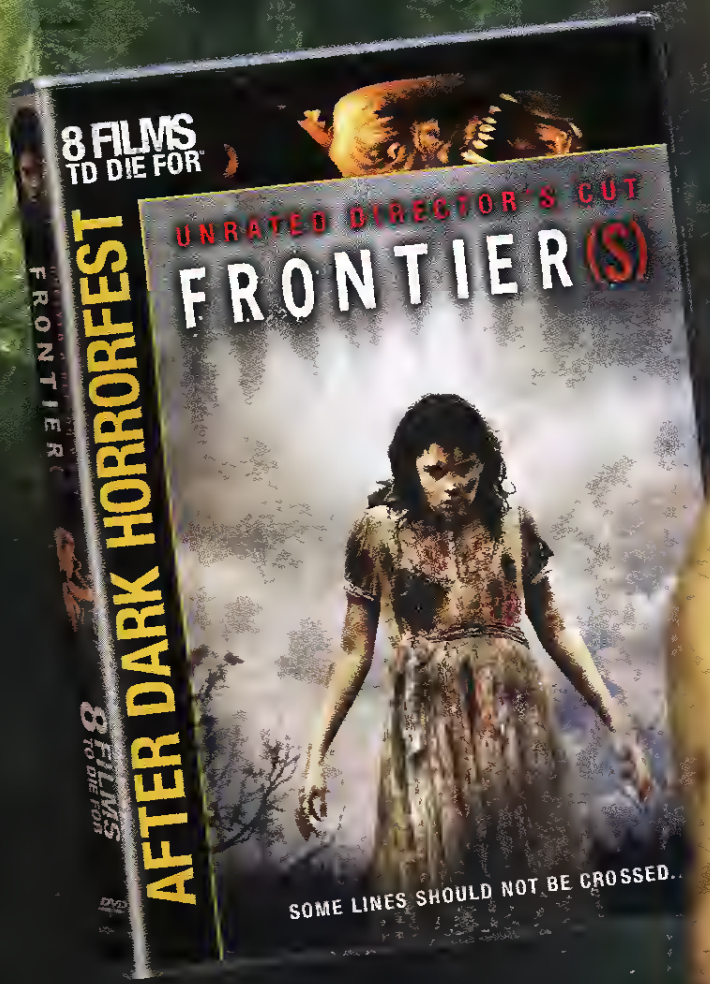
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ENFANTS TERRIBLES 16
A handful of young French filmmakers are re-invigorating the genre with films that are both beautiful and bloody. Rue Morgue interviews the latest practitioners of Franco gore movies, with a look at the pregnancy-themed slasher Inside, from newcomers Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury, as well as the politically conscious survival horror Frontier(s). Plus: Interviews with the female anti-scream queen stars of both films, reviews of recent fright films from France, and more!
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May 2008 Issue #78

Note From Underground

Most horror villains are male, so when females appear in the role of the "bad guy," they really stand out. Is it because they are more complex? Or because they are, in essence, inseparable from the idea that they are females – as is the case with "La Femme", the unusual antagonist of Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury's punishing French slasher flick, *Inside* (a.k.a. *A l'interieur*) – our cover story.

A few murderous maidens of note who are motivated by (and inseparable from) conspicuously gender-specific concerns include May Canaday (*May*), Carrie White (*Carrie*), Marie (*High Tension*), Pamela Voorhees (*Friday the 13th*), Rose (*Rabid*), Nola Carveth (*The Brood*), The Madam of the House (Mike's "Imprint"), Asami Yamazaki (*Audition*), One Eye (*Thriller: A Cruel Picture*), Sil (the *Species* films), Ginger Fitzgerald (*Ginger Snaps*), Ruth Chandler (*The Girl Next Door*), the depraved Mother/Daughter duo from *Singapore Sling*, the notorious Isla (*She Wolf of the S.S.*) and, hell, even the Queen Alien, who has a reason to kill that no male could ever possess.

But even Giger's extraterrestrial monster, which pumps out nasty acid-bleeding, throat-fucking, genderless parasites, can't compete with the relentless, medical scissor-wielding stalker in *Inside*. In her, we have a rare brand of red-letter female villain. A captivating, complex character driven by complex motivations that compel her to tirelessly pursue a recently widowed pregnant woman with a single spoil in mind: an unborn child, which she plans to rip from the womb.

Known only as La Femme (played to gruesome perfection by eccentric French actress Béatrice Dalle), the mysterious, unstoppable stalker seethes with myriad emotions – intense hatred, envy, desperation, sadness, tenderness, barbaric desire and sadistic joy – as she unleashes a level of cruelty upon her victim that drove many viewers out during the film's festival screenings.

With its pregnancy theme and Y-chromosome killer, *Inside* is a distinctly female movie. Like many films of its ilk (it fits the slasher template rather snugly), it's still obsessed with torturing gals, but it's the thoughtful woman-on-woman violence that sets it apart from its American counterparts. Both characters are broken, depressed, destroyed on the inside, but at the same time quite possibly the strongest the genre has ever seen, likely because they are mobilized not by the fear of death, but by a powerful maternal instinct to protect (or take) what is rightfully theirs. Ultimately, La Femme is more than your average slasher, dressed in black, she is death – a metaphor for stillbirth.

Bearing excessive bloodshed, outright butchery and delicate subject matter, it's no surprise *Inside* was made outside of the Hollywood studio system. It was conceived by two young Frenchmen – a child they nurtured and carefully protected from censors who brandish their own kind of dangerous scissors. In the shockingly sanguinary film, an explosion of extreme violence spills forth, like so much embryonic fluid, charmed by the kind of sophisticated arty gore it seems only the French can offer these days.

Artistically, it reminds me a little of my favourite short horror movie, Nacho Cerdà's *Aftermath*, another foreign masterpiece. Both films have similar meditative qualities about life and death and the nature of their dynamic, yet are often vilified and dismissed by the casual viewer as offensive "gore films." Understandably, they ask a lot of viewers, who are often too lazy, thin-skinned or just plain scared to dig deep into a film, then within themselves, which is really the way to the heart of a story like *Inside*.

I love films that capably challenge people, ones that apply pressure, provoke controversy, extreme emotions and radical views. Like *Aftermath*'s signature corpse-defiler, *Inside*'s bad beauty yields diverse emotional reactions, some natural (fear of losing a child – or having one), some repugnant (a suggestive, perversely amorous quality is undeniably present in La Femme), some shocking (her repeated attempts at foetal trauma).

Fundamentally, *Inside* is an art film, a gorgeous, grand guignol style blood ballet, dressed-to-kill with dignified feminine beauty. At the same time, it's a colossally draining experience for *both* genders, which is what makes it a true success as a horror film, and La Femme an equally successful villain.

Personally, my uterus hurts just thinking about her. Yours will too.

Jovanka

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Horror in Culture & Entertainment

RUE MORGUE MAGAZINE

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Rue Morgue #78 is dedicated to the memory of George Garris. Rest in peace.

COVER INSIDE
DESIGN BY GARY PULLIN

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Post Mortem

QUESTIONS • COMMENTS • CRITICISM

I HAVE NEVER BEEN so grateful for an upcoming horror director to come along and breathe new life into me. I am referring to Jim Mickle, and [star/co-writer] Nick Damici. I thought their film *Mulberry Street* would be just another fly-by-night horror film, but it was not. I enjoyed the words of encouragement and dedication they offered, which all up-and-coming film students or filmmakers should hear. Thank you so much guys, good luck to you.

Jeremiah Vargo – San Diego, Californa

GEORGE ROMERO got his inspiration for *Night of the Living Dead* from Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*? Oh my! Unless I am misreading your comments in "Note from Underground" (*RM#76*), you don't like the idea that someone's "intellectual property" can be used as a springboard for a new story. Historically, all artists' works, in any medium, have always inspired other artists for countless centuries (ask William Shakespeare or Walt Disney). There is a big difference between a work of art inspiring another artist and outright plagiarism. If the corporations succeed in persuading congress to completely revamp US copyright law (as a reaction the internet), the artist as we know him will nearly vanish. Imagine trying to create an original work of art with no references to any pre-existing work. It will be close to impossible. I support "ripping" creativity from the culture and "mixing" it into something new. I abhor plagiarism.

Don Lamelin – Warwick, Rhode Island

I'VE ALWAYS APPRECIATED the level of professionalism that all of you bring to the horror genre through the pages of your great magazine. Dave Alexander's review of *I Am Legend* titled "The Last Prince Of Bel-Air" was met with mixed emotions. While it dissects the less-than-stellar effort with a keen sensibility, with a knowledge of both the original story and its two film adaptations, Dave reduces any appropriate observations to mere schoolyard squabbling by repeatedly using the phrase "douche" to refer to Lawrence/Protosevich/Goldsman/Smith's Robert Neville. This is the sort of comment I would expect to hear come out of the mouth of a pretentiously sarcastic teenager upon exiting the theatre. I guess this is upsetting because I expect a certain seriousness towards the horror world from your magazine, too often fanatics like myself are shunned for even pursuing these genre interests. Fun is fun, bad is bad, and speech is free, but this seems to be an angry misstep that comes from a more puerile vantage point. It's one step away from using "gay" as an adjective.

Reed Eldridge – New York, New York

REVIEWS SUCH AS [those published in the article] "The Polities of Giallo" by Jason Pichonsky are why I decided to become a subscriber. I love giallos probably beyond reason and was thrilled he highlighted two relatively unknown gems in the genre. I agree with nearly all he said. *Glass Dolls* is perhaps not a true giallo, but is still effective as a thriller. I also agree that George Lazenby's rather emaciated appearance in *Who Saw Her Die?* is rather striking. I only wish he could have said more about Ennio Morricone's "children's choir" score, for it is absolutely chilling! I think it truly is one of the creepiest scores ever composed for a movie. The score, coupled with the film's Venice setting (used for eerie effect almost as successfully it was in *Don't Look Now*) makes *Who Saw Her Die?* one of the scariest, and best, giallos ever.

Trent Daniel – address withheld

THANK YOU for your interview with Brian Keene. I was introduced to his work in 2007 then blazed through his canon. If I didn't already read your magazine regularly, it would have started with that issue.

Todd Bristow – uglycouchshow.com

I'M WRITING [because] I feel a need to defend Jack Ketchum, his works and, most importantly, the film adaptation of *The Girl Next Door*. It shows a realistic, accurate depiction of the kind of horrors that really do take place every single day. The only problem that I can see with people watching this film is that it was taken from true events that have been slightly embellished. I give Jack Ketchum, as well as the creators of the adaptation, respect for bringing real horror to a genre oversaturated with stale remakes and copycats.

Ryan Coby – Richmond, Illinois

PEOPLE SEEM to be taking exception to *The Girl Next Door*, the fact that it was covered in your hallowed pages, and the fact it was even put to film at all. I can say this: it is a story that deserves to be told, and America deserves to be made aware that while the novel itself is fictional, the incident it depicts is real. As such, *Rue Morgue* is absolutely justified in covering it because if that is not horror, nothing is. As far as one thinking it titillating or sexually arousing to pedophiles, one should read the book and then see if one changes his/her mind.

Nick Ferrara
– Franklin Square, New York

I WAS READING the comments section in *RM#76*. I was a little upset to find so much negative feedback to the film *The Girl Next Door*. I realize the story was embellished but I thought it was tastefully done. Evil like that does exist and I don't think you have to be a pedophile to find it interesting. For those of you who would rather pretend this kind of thing doesn't happen, I suggest you watch family movies like *Happy Feet* and leave movies like *The Girl Next Door* for people who can appreciate the true battle of good vs evil.

Kelly Cheezum
– Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

We encourage readers to send their comments via mail or e-mail. Letters may be edited for length and/or content. Please send to info@rue-morgue.com or:

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Dreadlines

News Highlights Horror Happenings

Rue Morgue Cinema launches first feature-length project, releases new short

Fresh off the completion of his third short film, *The Facts in the Case of Mister Hollow*, *Rue Morgue* president Rodrigo Gudiño has announced plans to take on his first full-length feature project, a remake of the 1972 Spanish horror period piece *Cut Throats Nine*.

"*Cut Throats Nine* is, at heart, a very gripping story that is full of possibilities in terms of its characters and situations," Gudiño explains. "The basic story is there and it's a very good one, and that is the cornerstone to a good movie."

Infamously touted as "possibly the most violent Eurowestern ever made" by *Psychotronic Video Guide*, *Cut Throats Nine* (a.k.a. *Condenados a vivir*) has long enjoyed a cult reputation as an underrated grindhouse staple, serving up a bleak yet gleefully mean-spirited take on the spaghetti western punctuated with surprising splashes of low-rent, over-the-top gore.

The film tells the story of seven murderous prisoners, all shackled together, who are being transported by Union soldiers from their detail at a gold mine to a fort where they will finish their life sentences. But when the party is ambushed by bandits, only the prisoners, a sergeant and his beautiful teenage daughter survive. Stranded in a snowy mountain pass without horses or a wagon, the sergeant pledges to get his prisoners to their destination, all the while trying to protect his daughter from the bloodthirsty chain gang and determine which one of the seven raped and murdered his wife.

Though Gudiño describes the film as "crude, unpolished and in many ways unfinished," he says the potential behind *Cut Throats Nine*'s classic tale of greed, murder and revenge makes it an ideal subject for Rue Morgue Cinema's foray into feature-length filmmaking.

"I wanted to tackle something that was narratively straightforward for my first feature and also something that I was not completely emotionally invested in," he says. "There is a certain objective quality to remaking somebody else's film that appeals to me as a first-time feature filmmaker."

Rue Morgue Cinema, an offshoot of *Rue Morgue* magazine, has cleared the rights for the film and received blessings from writer/director Joaquin Luis Romero Marchent and co-writer Santiago Moncada, both of whom Gudiño says are "very supportive and excited" to see their material remade for a modern audience. Gudiño has also completed an early draft of the script – co-written with *Rue Morgue* contributor Joseph O'Brien (*Robocop: Prime Directives*) – which he reveals will remain faithful to the source material.



"The original film was shot in a style very much of its time and under budgetary constraints, and though the spirit of the film survives, the story could be made a lot stronger," Gudiño says. "I would say it's a very faithful retelling of the story, only much more twisted, violent, intense and horrific than the original."

Marco Pecota, *Rue Morgue*'s financial controller and producer of Gudiño's shorts, is on board to produce *Cut Throats Nine*.

The announcement of this project comes on the heels of the completion of *The Facts in the Case of Mister Hollow*, Gudiño's follow-up to *The Demonology of Desire* and *The Eyes of Edward James*. Co-directed by award-winning visual artist and musician Vincent Marcone (MyPetSkeleton.com, Johnny Hollow), *Mister Hollow* centres on the investigation of an unusual photograph dating back to the 1930s, which reveals a hidden tale of kidnapping and murder in the details. The film begins its festival run this spring; check out rue-morgue.com for news and updates on upcoming screenings.

Chris Boutet



Convention to celebrate 30 years of *Halloween* this fall

Thirty years after the night *he* came home, fans of the *Halloween* franchise will head to Pasadena, California to celebrate the silver anniversary of John Carpenter's iconic slasher. Called 30 Years of Terror, the fan-organized convention will take place from October 31 to November 2 and will feature personalities involved with every film in the series.

This will be the second *Halloween* convention organized by Sean Clark, who also put together a 25th anniversary event in Pasadena called Halloween Returns to Haddonfield – the inspiration for the 2006 documentary *Halloween: 25 Years of Terror*. That convention featured celebrity guests from across the franchise, from Dick Warlock (*Halloween II*, *Halloween III*) to Danielle Harris (*Halloween 4*, *Halloween 5*, Rob Zombie's *Halloween*), a bus tour of original *Halloween* and *Halloween II* shooting locations, panel discussions and other fan events. This time, Clark intends to greatly expand the celebration for 30 Years of Terror.



25 Years Of Terror Guests: *(left to right) Chris Durand* ***(H20)****, Jim Winburn* ***(H-1)****, Tom Morga* ***(H-4)****, organizer Sean Clark, Don Shanks* ***(H-5)****, Brad Loree* ***(H-8)****, Dick Warlock* ***(H-2 & H-3)****, and George P Wilbur* ***(H-4 & H-6)***

"So far, we have a bunch of new guests from the *Halloween* family coming that were not at the 25th, like Tom Atkins [star of *Halloween III*], Tommy Lee Wallace [*Halloween III* writer/director], John Michael Graham [Bob Simms from the original *Halloween*], Lance Guest [Jimmy from *Halloween II*] and more," he says. "We are still working on the big guns and things are looking good."



While *Halloween* co-star P.J. Soles is one of the headline guests, no *Halloween* personality is too obscure to make this year's list, which includes everyone from Tom Proctor (Truck Driver from *Halloween 6*) to Harlow Marks (Bucky from *Halloween 4*).

"Harlow thought I was playing a prank on him when I called," says Clark. "He couldn't believe that there was a cult following for Bucky the power plant worker. When I told him there was a website called Bucky's Power Plant he was in shock."

Clark is still on the hunt for Stacey Nelkin (Ellie from *Halloween III*) and Wendy Kaplan (Tina from *Halloween 5*), two of the most requested guests.

The 30th anniversary gathering will also feature a much grander scale Horror's Hallowed Grounds bus tour. The tour will be expanded to six hours in order to include locations from some of the sequels, as well as some non-*Halloween* sites, such as the church from John Carpenter's *The Fog* and Nancy's house from *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. Other new highlights include a prop museum, plus Alan Howarth (composer on *Halloween II* through *6*) playing a live set of *Halloween* music.

The 30 Years of Terror convention isn't strictly for devotees of the original films, however. Clark plans to make Rob Zombie's *Halloween* just as big a part of the festivities, as he points out that the remake has turned a whole new generation of younger fans onto the franchise. There will be more cast members from Zombie's film in attendance than any other *Halloween* installment.

"The fact that it was a cameo-fest has a lot to do with that," Clark admits. And while he says that it's unlikely there will be a 35th anniversary celebration, Clark isn't counting out more *Halloween* conventions.

"I said I would never do another one after the 25th and here we are now, so who knows. Anything's possible, I guess."

For more information, including a regularly updated guest list, visit 30yearsofterror.com.

Aaron Von Lupton



Dreadlines

ROADKILL

FROM THE INFO HIGHWAY

terrortrap.com
If you love vintage fright flicks, visit this online museum of horror movies from 1925 to 1987. Featuring a comprehensive database of reviews, a TV terror section, features, director spotlights and more lists than you can shake a half-eaten finger at, there's no shortage of genre goodies here!

roadkilltoys.com
Bearing a name that couldn't be more suitable for this column, Roadkill Toys specializes in creating plush animals that look as though they've just been smashed by a sedan. The limited edition crushed critters are vigorously safety tested and perfect for children of all ages who like to play with dead things.

evilontwolegs.com
Sure, Corey and Jon love horror, but their devotion to slashers and other fright fare isn't unconditional, as proven by their blog, Evil on Two Legs. There you'll find fond reminiscences, rants, haiku horror reviews and down-to-earth commentary on genre cinema via their "pointless observations."

dirkstrangely.com
Meet Dirk Strangely, the artist/writer behind *Darkened Bedtime Stories for Children* and a bunch of fine art renderings of creatures who look as if they might have crawled out of one of David Firth's *Salad Fingers* animations. Despite the spelling errors, there's plenty here for those who like strange and cartoonish art.

coondogcemetery.com
As the URL suggests, the Coon Dog Cemetery is an honest-to-goodness pet cemetery. In fact, its been interring coon dogs (a tracking dog that's part of the hound family) since 1937. Now home to the remains of some 185 pooches, it's also an Alabama tourist attraction. Presumably located up *that damn road*!



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Compiled by Monica S. Kuebler
Got a Roadkill suggestion?
Email a link to: roadkill@rue-morgue.com

Stage adaptation of *Misery* restores horror to King's story

It's one of the most squeamish moments in Stephen King's canon. In an isolated farmhouse, Annie Wilkes, self-proclaimed "Number One Fan" of captive author Paul Sheldon, takes a freshly sharpened axe and chops off the novelist's foot before cauterizing the stump with a blowtorch. The scene was softened to a bit of nasty business with a sledgehammer in Rob Reiner's 1990 movie adaptation, but the gushing amputation will be restored in a new production of Simon Moore's stage adaptation of *Misery* at Toronto's Bluma Appel Theatre this month.

The play's director, David Storch, says that if the amputation ends up half as scary on stage as it plays in his imagination, the audience will be in for a shock.

"You'll see Annie rolling in the cart full of supplies," he explains. "You'll see and hear her sharpening the axe, which is normally a banal farm sound but terrifying in the context. And then there's going to be a lot of screaming and blood spattering and a foot falling into a metal bucket."

The brutality of the scene is part of Storch's plan to deliver what he says is missing from many so-called "suspenseful" plays: real suspense, real fear and real horror. It's also essential to Moore's script, which stresses the mounting sense of claustrophobia, hopelessness and terror of King's novel by confining the action to Wilkes's farmhouse and featuring only two actors, played this time out by Canadian stage vets Tom McCamus and Nicola Cavendish.

Storch, who also served as The Canadian Stage Company's artistic director for the 2007-2008 season, has spent a lot of time exploring dark themes on stage recently, directing Judith Thompson's *Palace of the End* (a look into the horrors of Saddam Hussein and the Abu Ghraib prison) and overseeing CanStage productions of *The Elephant Man*, *Little Shop of Horrors* and Martin McDonagh's surreal tale of child murder *The Pillowman*. With *Misery*, though, Storch is faced with the challenge of mounting an almost straight-out work of horror, a rarity in live theatre.



Nicola Cavendish plays Annie Wilkes

"Horror is very hard to do in theatre," he explains. "With film, you can perfectly control and time what people see and when. You can have the spooky music and the killer slowly walking down the hallway – and a second later you can have the audience around the corner waiting for the killer. On stage, you cannot control exactly where the audience will look but you can do an awful lot to focus attention with timing and the movement of actors and lighting."

Storch is also relying on sound effects and original music to soften up his audience. He has commissioned a score by James Fisher (a.k.a. Zirco Fish), the musical force behind *Rue Morgue*'s *Nightmare Picture Theatre* multimedia show, and artist responsible the magazine's Disfigures of Speech illustrations.

"Fisher's musical sensibilities," Storch says, "mix playful, weird and menacing aural textures, which are perfectly suited for the play's mix of horror and black comedy."

Storch doesn't expect any spontaneous fainting in the audience on opening night, but as far as he's concerned you can't scare a paying customer enough, especially where axes and blowtorches are concerned.

"I'm determined to get as much gore on stage as possible, particularly in the hobbling sequence," he insists. "We owe it to the story to make the scene something horrible to watch – in the best way, of course."

Misery plays at the Bluma Appel Theatre from May 1-31.

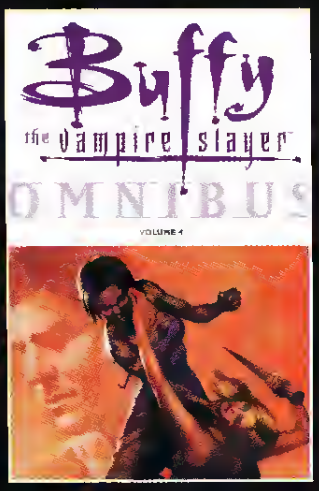
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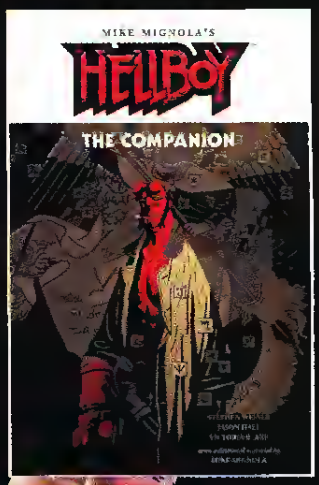


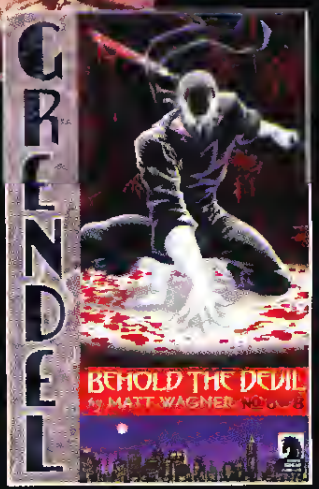
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DARK HORSE COMICS

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THE CORONER'S REPORT 13

Weird Stats & Morbid Facts

✚ After changing the batteries in her toddler James' Elmo Knows Your Name doll, Florida resident Melissa Bowman was shocked to hear the malfunctioning toy repeating one phrase over and over: "Kill James."

✚ *The Exorcist* was edited in a studio located at 666 Fifth Avenue in Manhattan.

✚ The Tudors believed that rheumatism could be cured by wearing the skin of a donkey.

✚ The mayor of the small village of Sarpourenx in southwest France recently threatened the town's 260 residents with "severe punishment" should any of them die because the local cemetery is full and the village has thus far been unable to acquire new land to house their dead.

✚ Dracula has appeared in more films than any other fictitious character.

✚ *Playboy* founder Hugh Hefner was an avid horror movie fan as a child, and at age fourteen his first "publication" was a hand-drawn, handwritten periodical called *Shudder!*, devoted to horror and mystery movies.

✚ Through tests, forensic scientists have determined that if a severed head lies on an incline of more than eighteen degrees, it is likely to roll to the bottom of the slope.

✚ While filming George A. Romero's *Day of the Dead*, effects artist Greg Nicotero used a gruesome model of his own head – created for the film's laboratory scene – to play a morbid joke on his mother.

✚ Former Liberian president Charles Taylor is currently on trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity. It is alleged that he commanded his militiamen to kill and eat African peacemakers, UN personnel and others who opposed his rule. His troops apparently obliged.

✚ Actor Andrew Robinson improvised his final line ("Jesus wept") in *Hellraiser*.

✚ Playwright Tennessee Williams (*A Streetcar Named Desire*) accidentally choked to death on the cap of a bottle of eye drops he was about to use.

✚ When director Victor Halperin suddenly quit during the production of *White Zombie*, directorial duties were taken over by several people, including Bela Lugosi.

✚ Two Fullerton, California moviegoers were recently stabbed during a screening of *The Signal* – a film in which radio, TV and cell transmissions turn people into violent maniacs.

Compiled by **Monica S. Kuebler**
Got a weird stat or morbid fact?
Send it through to info@rue-morgue.com

The Rue Morgue SICK TOP SIX

Instances of SKIN STRIPPING



1. *Silent Hill*
 Pyramid Head's birthday suit seizure
2. *Hellraiser II*
 Julia's wind-shed sheath
3. *Masters of Horror: Pelts*
 Meatloaf's self-exposed meat
4. *Dagon*
 Excised wino epidermis
5. *TCM 2*
 LG's lost outer layer
6. *Poultrygeist*
 A customer comes out of his shell

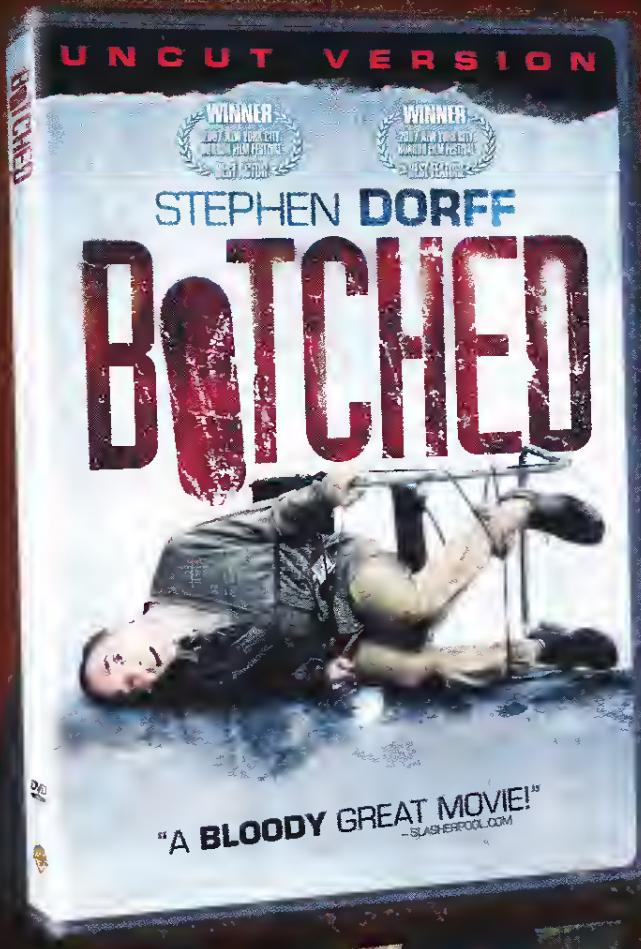


James Fisher **zircocircus.com**

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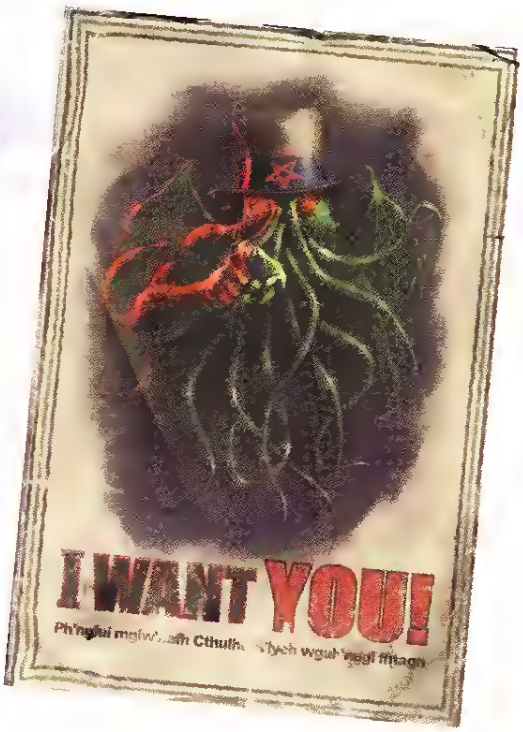


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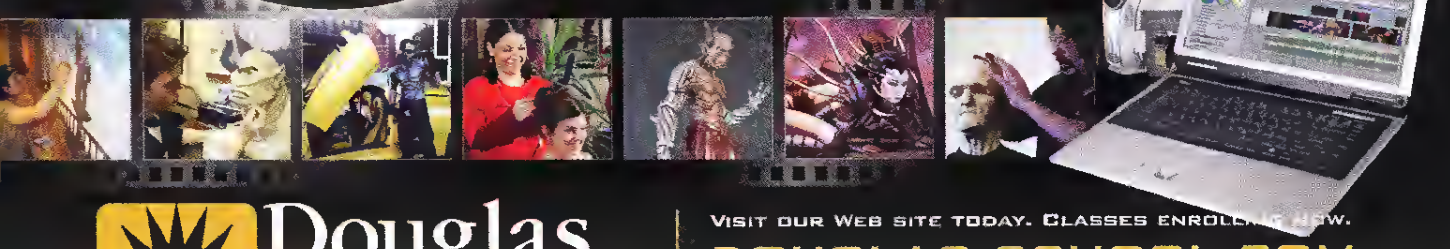
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Rue Morgue interviews the latest practitioners of beautiful French gore movies, starting with a look at the excruciating, pregnancy-themed slasher ***Inside.***



Enfants TERRIBLES

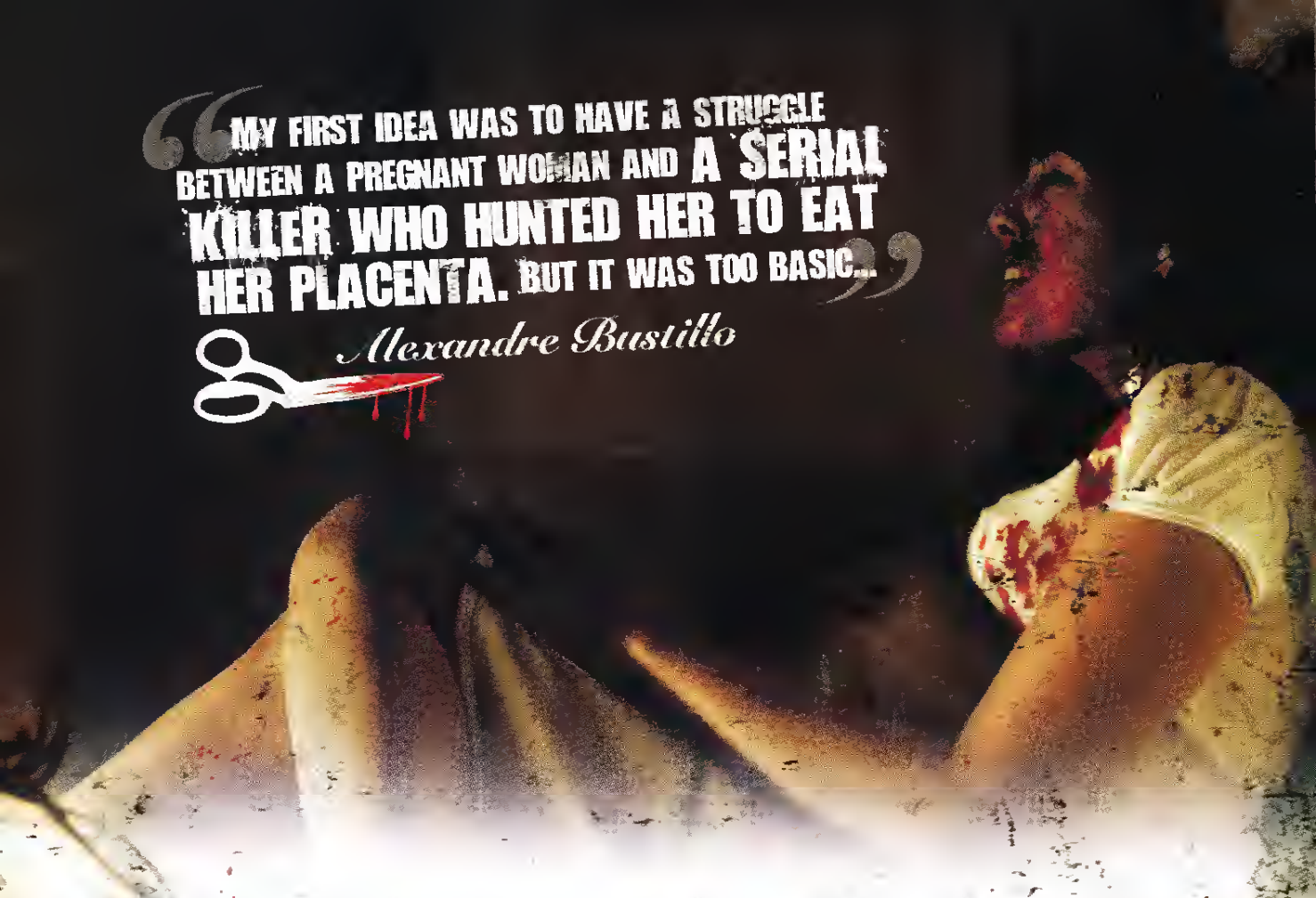
by Stuart F. Andrews

"Thank God the French exist!" Woody Allen facetiously uttered in his 2002 comedy *Hollywood Ending*, but as self-respecting, hardcore horror fans, we can scream it from the rooftops of the world without a shred of irony. Not only did they give us the Theatre du Grand-Guignol and the first horror film ever made (Georges Méliès' 1896 *Le manoir du diable*) but as the American film industry continues to wallow in creatively bankrupt remakes and sequels, it is the French who have emerged as saviours of our beloved genre with uncompromising slices of recent mayhem such as *Irreversible*, *High Tension* (a.k.a. *Haute tension*), *Them* (a.k.a. *Ils*), *Sheitan*, *Calvaire* and *Frontier(s)* that have collectively infused familiar horror film trappings with saucy French art house riffs.

With a delicious nihilism and willingness to plunder the dark edges of humanity, these cinema fantastique practitioners have pushed audiences into some of the most sadistic places imaginable. Perhaps it's the bubbling civil unrest, the Parisian riots and President Nicolas Sarkozy's ominous right-wing regime that have provided such a wellspring of nightmare imagery, but from the reactionary impulse of *High Tension* to the satirical slant of *Frontier(s)* – think *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* meets *Mein Kampf* – it's clear that this recent spate of grotesqueries reflects both a turbulent social climate and a disturbed cultural psyche. However, these filmmakers understand one very important thing that continues to elude their US contemporaries: in order to be legitimately violent and intense, the films have to be "cinematically" violent and intense. The French wield the tools of cinema with savage precision.

But as ruthless as this current crop of shock-meisters are, a couple of new kids on the block have substantially raised the bar for unfettered cinematic trauma. Meet 32-year-old Alexandre Bustillo and 29-year-old Julien Maury, first-time filmmakers and co-directors of *Inside* (*À l'intérieur*), possibly the most unhinged French horror film of the last ten years.

Predicated on one of the most unsettling premises ever devised, *Inside* stars Alysson Paradis (see p.20) as Sarah, a recently widowed pregnant woman at full term. She's spending one last night at home alone before being admitted into hospital to deliver her child when a strange woman – known simply as "La Femme" and played to alarming effect by eccentric



> "MY FIRST IDEA WAS TO HAVE A STRUGGLE BETWEEN A PREGNANT WOMAN AND A SERIAL KILLER WHO HUNTED HER TO EAT HER PLACENTA. BUT IT WAS TOO BASIC..."
>
> *Alexandre Bustillo*

French star Béatrice Dalle – comes a-banging at the door. La Femme is mysteriously obsessed with one agonizing agenda: to rip Sarah's unborn child from her womb. Brandishing a heavy pair of stainless steel surgical scissors, she dispatches all who cross her path in the most merciless manner imaginable and Sarah must fend her off, all whilst suffering the throes of labour.

Dalle is terrifying in the role. With her oddly disturbing beauty and that impossibly huge gap between her front teeth, she's the ideal horror movie villain. Dressed in a heavy, black gothic dress, she cuts an ominous silhouette against a perpetual background of diffused yellow light. In the greatest tradition of European horror cinema, *Inside* is as evocative and lyrical as it is cruel, channelling the lurid quality of the Italian giallo alongside the stark minimalism of John Carpenter's *Halloween*.

When the film premiered in North America at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 2007, it left its audience shell-shocked. The Weinstein Company snatched up the distribution rights, but due to the film's extreme content and the assorted vagaries of the film business, *Inside* was released just recently straight to DVD through the Dimension Extreme imprint.

Xavier Gens' *Frontier(s)* is considered a gorgeously bloodsoaked companion piece to *Inside*; it played alongside it at TIFF and both films have the same cinematographer. It will be released this month as well – also straight to DVD due to its gory content (p.22). That these festival fan favourites are not getting a theatrical release in North America simply underscores how out of step the American horror movie industry is with the demands of "real" horror fans.

Nevertheless, Bustillo and Maury seem destined to follow in the footsteps of their countryman Alexandre Aja (who, after seemingly initiating this new wave of gory French horror cinema with 2003's *High Tension* remade *The Hills Have Eyes*) and could very well travel to the US to get in on the remake frenzy. The Weinsteins commissioned them to helm a "re-imagining" of Clive Barker's *Hellraiser* (although as of press time it was being reported that they were off of the project).

Rue Morgue catches up with the demented duo in an effort to learn how a couple of neophyte filmmakers managed to infiltrate the genre with such an accomplished roller-coaster ride of utter carnage.

First of all, tell us what course of events inspired the pair of you to form this unholy alliance?

AB: It was during a black Sabbath under a pale grey moon. Or in jail. I don't remember.

JM: It was really simple, actually. Alex was a journalist for *Mad Movies*, the French *Rue Morgue*. I've been a reader of the magazine since I was young and when Alexandre arrived I was really fond of his style and always agreed with him. A mutual friend gave me his number so we met, and that first meeting was like an

Béatrice Dalle



The Bloodiest Bathroom: *Alysson Paradis (as Sarah) under siege and badly wounded.*

epiphany. It was like meeting a brother. We had really similar tastes and were really connected, so I gave him some of my short films and he gave me the first draft of *Inside*. The next day he told me he was in love with my films and I told him the same about *Inside*. It was love at first sight! [Laughs]

What sort of films were you writing about, Alex?

AB: I specialized in B-movies and slasher movies. I'm a big fan of Full Moon, Asylum, York Entertainment, that kind of shit. My first article for *Mad Movies* was about slasher movies.

So what inspired the sick and twisted script for Inside?

AB: A friend of mine was pregnant and I asked myself what a pregnant woman alone at home at night would feel. It certainly must be a weird feeling. My first idea was to have a struggle between a pregnant woman and a serial killer who hunted her to eat her placenta. But it was too basic, like every slasher movie with a fucking bad guy on one side and a poor innocent girl on the other. Changing the sex of the boogeyman was more interesting, more original, a real struggle for life.

Explain to us how the co-director relationship works exactly.

JM: It's really simple. We shared everything since the very beginning. With each step of the production, we [made] the decisions together. Alex wrote the first draft but we worked together on it after that. We did the storyboards together and the casting. We really worked hard before the shoot because it was our first movie. ... [Alex is] the bad cop and I'm the good one. We use this technique to get what we really want. On set with the actresses, for example, Alex says what he thinks and he is really honest and I'm always trying to be the nice guy and not be rude. So if we don't get what we want by the hard way, Alex's way, I come in and do the nice parts.

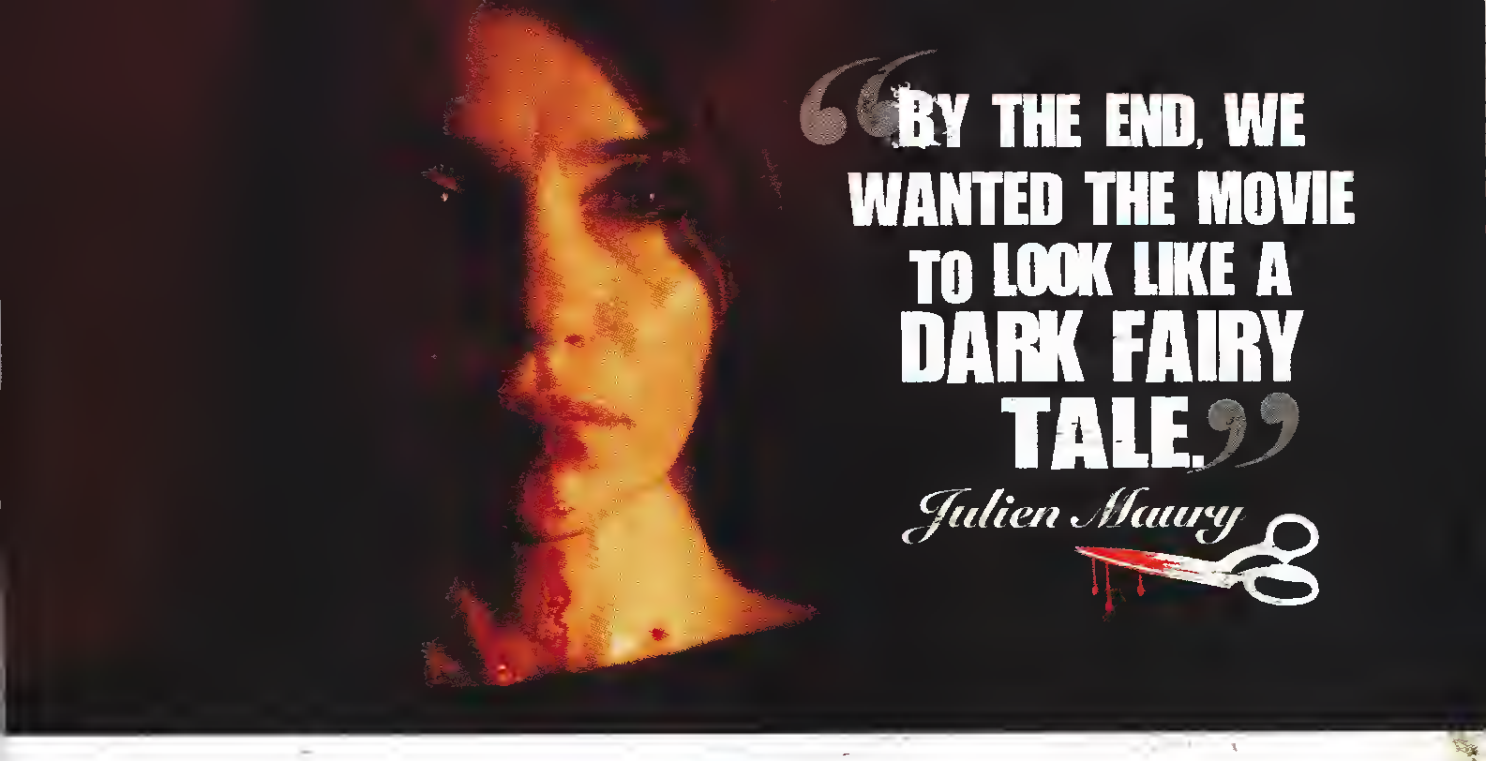
Tell me about your two female leads, beginning with Alysson Paradis.

AB: It was the idea of our producers to get her. We met her in a bar in Paris and before we even talked to her, Julien and I said to ourselves that just by watching her we could tell that she was going to be our Sarah. She was very determined and courageous and did fantastic work on this movie. [Alysson's brother-in-law] Johnny Depp will be proud!

JM: Yes, she had the physical appearance that we were looking for in Sarah. That is to say she's a really pretty, beautiful girl but she has a lot of sadness in the eyes, sort of a sad beauty. And she's not like the cliché main character in a horror movie. She's not like a model, really tall and blonde with blue eyes and big boobs. She's small and she's sort of a girl-next-door type, and that's really what we wanted. She said to us that she liked the script and that it wasn't a problem that she was not going to be pretty in the movie. You know, she's shown with her mouth cut since the beginning of the film. And during the whole movie, she's splattered with blood. She pees on herself. It's really not glamorous acting. But at this first meeting with her she said, "I'm not doing this job to be pretty. If I want to be pretty, I will be at the parties and the Cannes Film Festival."

Béatrice Dalle is absolutely terrifying in this movie. And she has a reputation for being a bit of a hellion in France. What was she like to work with?

JM: [Laughs] You cannot imagine what we had heard about her before starting this shoot. Everyone kept saying, "You are crazy! You are young directors and you're taking in this monster! She's going to hit you. She can't be controlled. She does what she wants when she wants!" And so everyone warned us, but you know, it was like [with] Alysson – we tried a lot of other actresses before her and each one threw the script in our faces and said, "You're nuts!" So we sent her a copy of the script and then one day we had a phone call. Beatrice had called the production company to say, "Okay. I like the script and I want to meet the boys. Then I will make my final



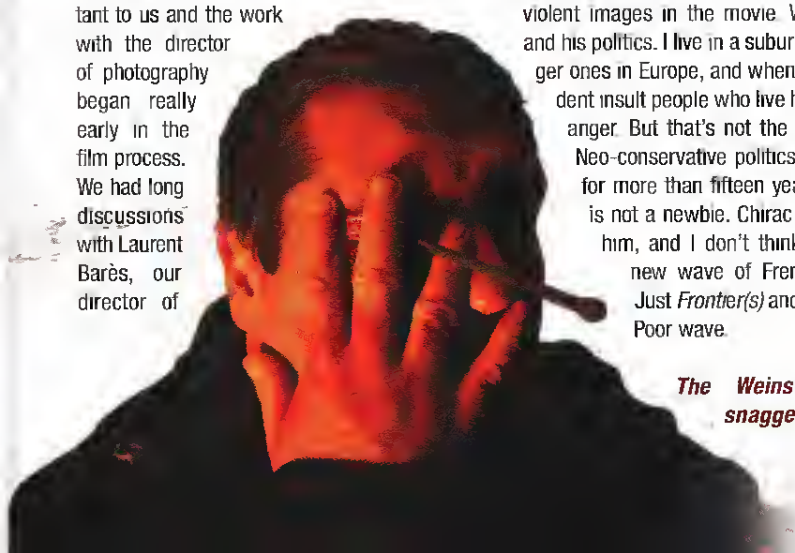
> "BY THE END, WE WANTED THE MOVIE TO LOOK LIKE A DARK FAIRY TALE."
>
> *Julien Maury*

decision " So we were really astonished and surprised. We met her in a café and the second we met her, all the bad things we heard about her vanished in the blink of an eye.

AB: It was like being in a dream when she called our producers back to say that she wanted to make the movie with us. One of my favourite movies is *Trouble Every Day* by Claire Denis. In that movie Beatrice plays a cannibalistic nympho who fucks and eats men. It's her favourite movie of her career but after seeing *Inside* for the first time, she told us that our movie is her next favourite. Béatrice is our friend now and she will be in our next feature.

What inspired the look and overall style of the film?

JM: Since the beginning, we really decided to do a good-looking movie. We always wanted to show the worst thing you can imagine but in the best way possible. So we didn't want to use a shaky cam and we always wanted a structured way to direct. The use of light was really important to us and the work with the director of photography began really early in the film process. We had long discussions with Laurent Barès, our director of photography. He had just finished *Frontier(s)*. We wanted to begin the movie in a really realistic way and have an image that looks like a cold day in winter. We wanted to reflect the mind of Sarah. She's depressed [but] doesn't have the strength to cry, she's totally destroyed from the inside. So we wanted to begin in a very realistic way and then step by step go to fantastic imagery, and by the end, we wanted the movie to look like a dark fairy tale. So we gave him a lot of movies to inspire him, like Dario Argento movies and, of course, John Carpenter's *Halloween*. And a French movie, the not so well-known *Death on a Rainy Sunday* [1986]. This one was our most important influences.



There are numerous references to the Paris suburb riots in the film. Do you see a relationship between the recent wave of French horror films and the surge of neo-conservatism in France?

AB: The real-life shots of the riots were very important for us because they're the only real violent images in the movie. We hate Sarkozy and his politics. I live in a suburb, one of the bigger ones in Europe, and when I hear the president insult people who live here, I shake with anger. But that's not the theme of *Inside*. Neo-conservative politics have been here for more than fifteen years now. Sarkozy is not a newbie. Chirac was here before him, and I don't think that there is a new wave of French horror films. Just *Frontier(s)* and *Inside*, that's all. Poor wave.

The Weinstein Company snagged the North American distribution rights for Inside but didn't give it a theatrical release. Why not?

JM: [Laughs] Don't ask me. You know, they were really hesitating about the release of the movie. They did some screenings in New York and they were really good. The welcome was really good too during the Festival in Toronto. It was amazing and they were really happy about it. But you know, I think the Weinsteins don't know what to do with our movie. In their minds it's too hardcore to release in theatres. And they are really trapped. They're used to cutting out the gory parts but the problem with *Inside* is the movie is only one hour and twenty minutes. So if you cut something, you end up with an episode of *Masters of Horror*. [Laughs]. And if you cut the ending, there is no ending, so you have nothing.

You're slated to co-direct the Hellraiser remake for the Weinsteins in the US but it's been reported that Marcus Dunstan and Patrick Melton (writers of Saw IV and V) have been hired to write the script. What's happening with the project?

JM: Honestly, we really don't know. It's quite fresh, this decision to hire these two guys we don't know. I spoke with the Weinsteins last week and we're supposed to do a conference call with these guys, and with Clive Barker, to expose their way of seeing the movie. So we are just waiting for the next step because we don't want to be just directors doing another bad remake. We'll wait and see if we still stay onboard.

Do you think Hellraiser needs to be remade?

JM: The script we originally wrote is not really a remake. We tried to rebuild the franchise and reinvent the mythology of *Hellraiser* and Clive

The anti-scream queens of ***Inside*** *and* ***Frontier(s)*** *reveal why they're so eager to suffer at the hands of French filmmakers.*

Only Women BLEED

by Dave Alexander

She's the last one standing at the end of a horror film because she's pretty yet not sexual, she doesn't drink or do drugs, is unusually resourceful at the right moments and generally represents a certain moral ideal. Film theorist Carol Clover famously dubbed this average female protagonist in a horror movie the "Final Girl" – but it's an archetype that's got little in common with the gore-caked women of recent French horror films.

The leading lady in Alexandre Aja's *High Tension* is a lesbian whose savagery is one and same with that of the slasher killer she can't escape; Xavier Gens' *Frontier(s)* brutalizes a young pregnant woman who's in a gang of violent political radicals and thieves; and Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury's *Inside* features a very pregnant widow under attack by another woman intent on tearing her baby from the womb. These anti-scream queens are the antithesis of the girl-next-door type and put an anguished new face on a time-honoured type.

"I didn't want to have makeup or even to have my hair dressed," asserts *Frontier(s)* star Karina Testa of her character, Yasmine. "All I wanted was to have more and more marks of tiredness, stress and despair on my face, and give up the feminine part of me. I took the character as a man would. I didn't want to be a banal, sexy 'scream queen.'"

"I think my character has something that belongs to all the mothers and female warriors. At the end, when she's covered with blood, fighting for her child, she's like a beast, screaming, biting. I think Xavier wanted something kind of iconic. Joan of Arc, maybe, because of the short hair and the old-school dress. It's sure that there is something gothic, romantic and at the same time very hardcore and urban in this character."

These films aren't a career stepping stone for plastic teen idol-types – the women starring in them are as committed as their directors to one-upping their American counterparts. Alysson Paradis, who plays the ready-to-pop Sarah in *Inside*, insisted the filmmakers go hard on her.

"I asked them to make my fake belly really heavy, like a real pregnant woman, so that really helped. Even the scars on my face and all the blood, that really helped me to be the character, 'cause that was so far from me. It took between two to three hours every day to get made up as Sarah, and that was like an emotional transtormation period. I tried to really be Sarah when the guys were saying 'action' and tried to feel what she was living. That was my way to work; I was really crying, and was really afraid."

Testa underwent a similar ordeal, as her character is shackled, shaved and shit-kicked through the mud.

"Making *Frontier(s)* has been a hard experience, physically and mentally," she admits. "It was like drowning, I was so much into my character that I was feeling bad. I had real badass nightmares, I didn't see my friends, we were shooting extensively night and day."

To prepare for the role, Testa trained on her own for five months prior to shooting (as there was no money in the budget to hire a trainer) and even plastered the walls of her apartment with pictures of war victims, in an effort to break herself down mentally. ("There is something really specific in their eyes, their body position, that induces a tumult of feelings," she asserts.)

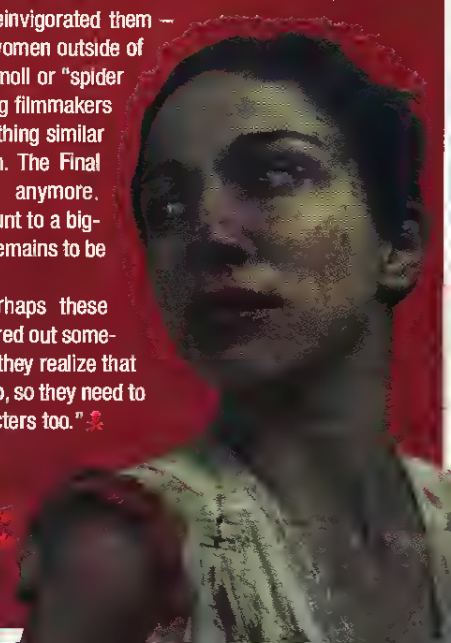
This so-called new wave of French horror consists of more *films* than popcorn movies, not just because they're first-time features from directors with something to prove, but also because they're a rarity. Unlike in North America, where slasher films and survival horror movies fight for space on rental shelves and open regularly in theatres, opportunities to explore truly transgressive cinema in France are scarce.

"Today, I just hope that more and more people will consider directors' and actors' work in horror movies, especially in France, where only the 'intellectual' movies are given consideration," laments Testa. "Before *Frontier(s)*, I only had fresh, sweet, girl-next-door characters [to play], so I wanted to get right inside a strong part, where I could express myself and create a character. There aren't a lot of movies in France that make such an intense character possible. So when you see one, you just grab it."

Paradis concurs: "It's so interesting for an actor to play in that kind of movie – so intense. I've learned so much about myself, about my resistance, about the way to play [a character]."

Just as the French new wave filmmakers of the '50s and '60s embraced American crime films and reinvigorated them – in part by making roles for women outside of the typical victim, gangster moll or "spider woman" – a handful of young filmmakers from France are doing something similar for the American horror film. The Final Girl is not the Final Girl anymore. Whether or not this will amount to a bigger movement in the genre remains to be seen.

Or, as Paradis says, perhaps these French filmmakers have figured out something much simpler. "Maybe they realize that girls love gore and horror also, so they need to identify with the main characters too."





Like A Hole In The Head: *Practical makeup FX combine with digital compositing to make* ***Inside*** *a graphic gore show, as evidenced by two of La Femme's victims*

Barker was okay with that. He was really exited about our ideas and what we wrote. And you know, what we wrote was really, really different from the original. We only kept the character of Pinhead and the Cenobites and we reinvented all the rest. [laughs] But obviously they didn't like it because they hired new scriptwriters, so we'll see. We're just in the middle of all this mess so it's really too early to tell.

But what are your general thoughts on all these remakes?

AB: I don't have any problems with them. I'm a big fan of Aja's *The Hills Have Eyes*; the new *TCM* is cool too, *Dawn of the Dead*, as well. Personally, I don't have any problem with remakes. Barker's movie won't disappear off the planet if we're doing a remake.

Is it necessary to make the move to the US if you want to continue working in the genre?

AB: It's very hard to make horror movies in France and if you want to continue making horror movies, yes, it's much easier to move to the USA. But for Julien and I the battle is here in France and we want to fight for "French genre cinema!"

JM: Hollywood is like a big machine. It needs fresh blood every day and the second you've finished that small movie in your country they call you and try to hire you to be part of the system. And you know, the temptation is really huge because in Hollywood they give you the means to do movies. There is a lot of money. And they are not afraid to do horror or fantastic movies. And that's exactly the two problems we have in France. The production system in France is ruled by the TV channels. If you want to finance a movie, you can't do it without the TV channels. And obviously they don't want to finance a movie they can't put on prime time. So for *Inside*, we didn't get any TV channels except for Canal+, and that's a private TV channel. And they couldn't give us a lot of money because of the hardcore script. So they are going to release it on TV but only at midnight or one in the morning. That's the main problem. It's possible to do horror movies in France but only on really, really low budgets. And the audience doesn't go to see horror movies, so they're not big blockbusters. And if it's not a hit at the box office, the producers don't want to produce it. So it's really that simple. We're trying to change things with our friend Xavier Gens, the director of *Frontier(s)*, and with Pascal Laugier, the director of *Martyrs*. We're now developing a new project in France but it's more adventurous and fantastic, starring hardcore-looking killers because we love that. I think it's going to be released in two versions. A PG version for theatres and an uncut version for the DVD release.

What's it called?

JM: The French title is *Neige*, meaning "Snow."

So do you plan on staying in the genre for a while?

AB: The horror genre forever! I don't want to shoot comedies or fucking *Die Hard 5*!

Finally, French horror directors seem to have a wonderful, fearless nihilistic streak. Where do you think this tendency comes from?

JM: In France, you have heavy, strong images in the cinema. Here, cinema is considered really as an art and not as entertainment. That's the vision we all have, the directors of horror movies. We don't want to do popcorn horror movies. Maybe it's because we've been raised in the culture that tells you to go further with the exploration of your subject. But here the cinema is always clever and if you do an entertaining movie, the critics are merciless. For Alex and me, we have a dark vision of life. We prefer living at night. We are night birds. We don't trust in the future. What we see in life despairs us, so we don't want to tell happy stories with happy endings because that's not how we see life. But you know, that's not because we're French. It's just our own perspective.

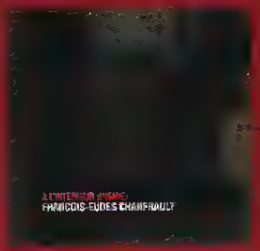
Whether lulling viewers into a false sense of security or frying their nerves, Inside boasts an unforgettable score.

Musique du VIOLENCE

You cannot escape the horror of *Inside* (*À l'interieur*) just by closing your eyes. The film's music is its own kind of psychological trauma, an unnerving pulse of eerie electronics and symphonic strings that makes viewers feel trapped right inside the characters' sanity-strapped heads.

The man to blame is François-Eudes Chanfrault, who has become the composer du jour for France's new crop of masters of horror. It was his work with Alexandre Aja on *High Tension* and *The Hills Have Eyes* remake which attracted co-directors Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury.

"They asked me to do what I usually do," Chanfrault recently told Rue Morgue Radio. "When I saw the movie I decided not to do what you would expect. Not to write tense music, but to do something more melancholic and dark than nervous. Because there is so much violence in this movie, there is too much. We know from the start that everyone will die in a horrible fashion. So I decided to put my camera, my own camera as composer, out of this huge mess."



Chanfrault considers the resulting work "far more than a soundtrack," and more like a proper solo album. Tracks ranging from twisted piano and cello lullabies to ambient drones or piercing electronics are best heard first onscreen, where they ratchet up the tension by emphasizing both the softer resting points and the horrifically violent outbursts.

Chanfrault points out that the movie's climax was too intense for any music, though. "The most difficult scene was the one we decided I won't put any music on – you know the one. Alexandre decided it would be so heavy to have this scene without music. And I have to admit I was really happy about this!"

Inside's score has been newly mixed and mastered for CD release on the French label Asphalt Duchesse, which also promises a compilation of Chanfrault's other previously unreleased filmworks. Meanwhile, the composer will be heard next on Fabrice du Welz's (*Calvaire*) upcoming horror film *Vinyan*.

Liisa Ladouceur

Frontier(s), the survival horror sister film to Inside, is the latest genre offering from France considered too dangerous for mainstream audiences on either side of the ocean

The Politics of BLOODLETTING

by Jason Lapeyre



It happens so often, it's practically a cliché. European director makes a brilliant first film and captures the attention of Hollywood studios. One of those studios invites the director to make a film based on thematically similar material. The director makes the film, but the studio is displeased with how unconventional the director's take on it is, despite the fact that the very unconventionality they dislike is what made the director's first film so special. The studio recuts the film and the director is sent packing back to Europe. The film is released, reviews are mediocre at best and the director gets on with his or her career.

So it began for Xavier Gens when he unveiled his brutally violent film *Frontier(s)* – or *Frontiere(s)* in its native tongue – in France and on the festival circuit in North America last year. The writer/director conceived it as a response to the growing fear in France that was a result of the country's political climate early in the decade.

"*Frontier(s)* is about the evolution of the extreme right in France," says the 33-year-old Gens, on the phone from that country. "In 2002, during the presidential elections, [ultra-conservative politician] Jean-Marie Le Pen made it to the second round of voting for president, and that was the most fear I ever felt in my life. I wanted to translate that fear in *Frontier(s)*."

Gens devised a survival horror scenario about a group of young men and a woman named Yasmine (Karina Testa) on the run from the police, who are forced to hole up in an isolated motel in the French countryside – a place that happens to be run by a brood of incestuous Nazi cannibals. They soon find themselves trapped on the family's farm, which sits on top of a massive underground bunker full of all sorts of nasty secrets. Led by a ruthless, white supremacist octogenarian patriarch (played to absolutely chilling effect by renowned French actor Jean-Pierre Jorris), the family decides Yasmine will join the clan to improve its gene pool by having a child with one of them. It's a vividly shot and extremely graphic riff on *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, set in the pastoral French countryside, and more pointed in its subtext. The shock of the victims discovering the nature of their situation and their disbelief in trying to deal with it was, for Gens, a political allegory.

"The French know the danger [Le Pen] represents, and everybody voted against him because when you see a representative of the extreme right making it to the second round of the presidential election, that is really frightening for everybody. You cannot accept that it is the truth." The film boils down this social anxiety and the violence behind right-wing ideology into a series of stomach-churning incidents – a variety of tortures, mutilations and murders. They're among the goriest ever filmed, and the reason Lionsgate is releasing the film this month straight to DVD in North America.

Fortunately, Gens' didn't stop at allegory and worked hard to infuse his film with real emotion.

"For me, the most important challenge on *Frontier(s)* was not only to show extreme violence, but to have emotion with the characters. I wanted to try to have the audience feel emotions through the violence, to understand how the violence comes about. It is the same message that [Pier Paolo] Pasolini attempted when he denounced fascism in *Salo* [a.k.a. *Salo, or The 120 Days of Sodom*]."

Although Gens doesn't go to quite the same demented lengths that Pasolini did for *Salo* (i.e. a feces banquet), *Frontier(s)* is undeniably one of the most violent films to ever come out of France, which is what almost stopped the film from getting made. Studio Canal+, which was the film's first distributor, wanted a PG-13-type movie.

Xens recalls, "I said to them, 'You read the script. There are many things, like a guy who is cut on a table saw, and cutting someone's Achilles tendons . . . we cannot have a PG-13 movie with that!' And the producer fought with me. He said, 'You have to cut everything, you just have to do a thriller.' So I had to say to him 'Fuck you.'"

Here's where a familiar story gets interesting. Gens ignored the producers and distributors, and with approval of his cast and crew completed the "forbidden" inserts at



Human Abattoir: *Hans (Joel Lefrançois, left) and Karl (Patrick Ligardes) prepare fresh meat, (below) Jean-Pierre Joris as Nazi patriarch Le Von Geisler, and (opposite) Karina Testa as pregnant heroine Yasmine*

night after the rest of the production was shut down. Then, he showed the dailies to fellow French filmmaker Luc Besson (*La Femme Nikita*, *The Professional*, *The Fifth Element*), who had read the script and told Gens that he wanted to distribute the movie as he had originally envisioned it. Shooting was already over, but since Gens had secretly captured everything he wanted to add to Canal's "thriller" cut, he was able to put the gore scenes back in and screened it for Besson, who saved the movie.

And the producer who fought Gens' gore shots all the way?

"He was really pissed off when he learned we had shot the scenes," says Xens, "but when Luc Besson said, 'No, it's really good,' the producer said to me, 'You can beat me up if you want.'"

The release of *Frontier(s)* was another battle, though, because France's exhibitors also lean towards the conservative. "It was really difficult, because the exhibitors don't want to show anything rated R," laments Gens. "Theatre owners say that violent movies attract rowdy audiences. So for us it is an act of rebellion to propose that kind of movie against the general taste."

Nevertheless, the film was released in a limited run and sold around 100,000 tickets, which Gens says is good in a country that rarely releases horror theatrically in the first place. The film's success – and notorious reputation – placed it squarely in a group of other French gore movies that had kicked off in 2003 with Alexandre Aja's *High Tension*, and includes *Calvaire* and *Inside*. Soon enough, the films were being referred to as a new wave of French horror. However, Gens thinks the reasons for the wave are less political and more pragmatic.

"I think there is a new wave of French horror because Studio Canal+ began actively financing horror movies with very small budgets in France. That is why we are really close friends with other directors like Julien Maury and Alexandre Bustillo [*Inside*]. For us it's like Peter Jackson or Sam Raimi – make a horror movie first and later, make A-list movies. But for the moment, we want to put all our influences on the screen through the horror movie."

With Besson's help, Gens almost immediately began work on *Hitman*, trying to stay true to the tone of the video game the film was based on. Given only fifteen days to turn in a cut by the film's studio, Fox, Gens rushed through an operatic, Scorsese-influenced, slow-paced, tremendously violent cut. It was rejected.

The studio wanted something more mainstream and brought in the guy known for producing bloodless, audience-friendly versions of films such as *Live Free or Die Hard*: Nicholas De Toth.

"The cut Fox saw, it was just a work in progress, really," Gens says. "And they decided to re-edit it completely, more like a mainstream movie, and they asked De Toth to do it. It's really not my cut of the film."

Gens knows he's not alone in his experience with Hollywood. Bustillo and Maury have had their script for the remake of *Hellraiser* rejected and Aja has been dropped from Paramount's adaptation of Charles Burns' graphic novel *Black Hole*.

"For us, it's a great chance to go make a movie in Hollywood," says Gens. "It's the dream we had as children. But when we are in Hollywood, we understand it's an industry and there is not really any place for artists. It's a great place to make industry movies, and if we want to make personal movies, auteur movies, we have to go see independent companies."

This is exactly what Gens did for his next project, *Vanikoro*. It's being described as a cross between *King Kong* and *Cannibal Holocaust* – but based on fact.

"It's the true story of Captain La Perouse, who crossed the world for King Louis XVI," Gens explains. "In 1788, his ship was lost, but today we know there were survivors on the island of Vanikoro. And on the island were two tribes, and there was a war between the two tribes, and one of them was... anthropophagus."

Gens has been asked by the current residents of Vanikoro to be sensitive to their history and not to use the "c"-word. He is, however, allowed to use the "s" word: sharks.

"When the ship is wrecked, I want to put on the screen the scene that Robert Shaw describes in *Jaws*, the sinking of the U.S.S. Indianapolis. After the shipwreck, they wait, and the sharks arrive and begin to eat the sailors one by one."

Caught between cannibals and sharks? Given Gens and his contemporaries' experiences of getting caught between the French and American film industries, *Vanikoro* might also just be a perfect metaphor for this new group of ambitious French horror directors.



A year before Alexandre Aja's High Tension put French bloodbaths in the spotlight, two of the country's other directors explored the horrors of the occult.

FRIGHTS *from France*



Malefique

Starring Philippe Laudenbach, Clovis Cornillac and Dmitri Rataud
Directed by Eric Valette
Written by Alexandre Charlot, François Cognard and Franck Magnier
BCI Eclipse

Eric Valette's *Malefique* was an early entry in the French horror boom that prefigured bloodier fifles such as *In My Skin* and *High Tension*, and it's shocking that it took this great little film six years to see a North American release of any kind.

After a brief, gory flashback, the story begins in a prison receiving room. Carrére is a man who had it all – a successful business, a doting wife, young son and an embezzlement plan for early retirement. Something went wrong, though, and he finds himself behind bars – temporarily, so he insists. But we know better, in a horror film, when bad things happen, they tend to be permanent.



A white-collar criminal, Carrére stands apart from his motley cellmates: Pâquerette the perverted child-like lunatic, bedwetter, self-mutilator and compulsive eater of non-food substances; Marcus the butchy mid-op transsexual who acts as mother/father/big brother to the developmentally stunted Pâquerette, and the reticent, sage-like Lassalle, a bookworm who refuses to read. The latter's phobia is put to the test with the arrival of the obligatory dusty occult text, in this case the occult diary of a former convict who believed he could stay young by eating placentae – from live victims.

Attempts to figure out how to use the book to escape result in some nice gross-out scenes and cringe inducing sound design; swirling lights and pulsating makeup effects complement the snapping of bones and tendons. The prisoners' damp, bug-infested, claustrophobic environment (the film takes place almost entirely inside the cell) feels almost Lovecraftian, which lends the proceedings a particularly creepy air.

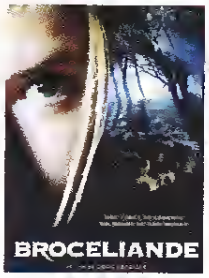
It's a shame that Valette's impressive feature debut was all but buried by its international distributor, Canal+, even after snapping up a handful of festival awards. (He was also behind the unfortunate *One Missed Call* remake.) This bare-bones North American DVD release from BCI is little consolation. While not without its flaws (particularly some third act plot holes and lapses in logic), *Malefique* is an unheralded milestone of French horror, and deserved better.

Kier-La Janisse

Broceliande

Starring Elsa Kikoine, Mathieu Simonet and Cylia Malki
Directed by Doug Headline
Written by Doug Headline and Benoît Lestang
BCI Eclipse

Though it shares the same brooding French countryside setting of many of its Gallic survivalist cousins, *Broceliande* owes more to the high gothic antics of Hammer's classic period and the ass-kicking, girl-power antics of *Buffy*. The story begins in the myth-drenched forests of Brittany – the supposed final resting place of Merlin in the Arthurian legends and the seat of ancient Druid culture in pre-Christian France – where a group of students, including the beautiful and enigmatic Chloé, have assembled for an archaeological dig.



Brooding shots of the ancient forest and a dramatic old school orchestral score cue the viewer that nothing good can come of the dig, a suspicion that's confirmed when Chloé witnesses the brutal murder of a renowned expert on Celtic culture. When the body disappears before the police arrive, she's left to her own devices to unravel the mystery, which centres on a priceless Druidic artifact that the Celts believed could summon a demonic entity – with the help of a few incantations and liberal doses of human sacrifice. Chloé eventually accepts help in unravelling the mystery from two of her handsome classmates and a kindly professor who, if this were a Hammer film, would have been played by Peter Cushing.

The lush colours, sweeping camera work, torch-lit settings and close-ups of heaving bosoms never quite fully exposed to the hungry camera are all reminiscent of a more innocent era, but director Doug Headline heaps on the occasional bit of gore, self-consciously gooty B-movie high-jinks and horror in-jokes to anchor the action in the contemporary. The fight scenes are a little on the lame side and the plot holes many, but the climax, set in a honeycombing Celtic necropolis beneath the forest floor is a welcome throwback to European occult horror flicks such as *Plague of the Zombies* and *Baron Blood*, complete with styrofoam boulders, perpetually burning torches and latex decapitated heads.

Both corny and kind of scary at the same time, *Broceliande* – presented here sans extras – makes for palette-cleansing viewing best enjoyed between heavier courses of hardcore French guignol.

James Grainger

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BLACK MAGIC Women

BY THE GORE-MET

For a couple of weeks last fall, Toronto was the centre of the universe for fans of legendary Italian filmmaker Dario Argento. After appearing as the guest of honour at the Rue Morgue Festival of Fear in August, Argento returned two weeks later to premiere his latest film, *Mother of Tears*, at the Toronto International Film Festival. But this was not just any Argento film, this was the long-anticipated conclusion to his "Three Mothers" trilogy that began with his most highly acclaimed work, *Suspiria* (1977), and continued in what many consider his last great artistic statement, *Inferno* (1980).

The roots of Argento's creative renaissance are found in his work on the two seasons of the defunct made-for-cable series *Masters of Horror*. The sense of playfulness found in his episodes "Jenifer" (2005) and "Pelts" (2006) recalls the arc of the wonderfully outrageous films he made in the '80s: *Tenebre* (1982), *Phenomena* (1985) and *Opera* (1987). *Masters of Horror* was cathartic for the director.

"I was happy, because the producer said to me, 'You shoot the film and we won't cut or censor it, you are free, absolutely free,'" he recalls about working with *MoH* creator Mick Garris on the show. "I was enthusiastic from the first day, I had a smile on my face; this was the first time in my life somebody had told me this. No censorship, nobody was going to cut my film or censor my thoughts. This was good. I shot the films and was very happy. At the end, I came back to Italy, and in the same spirit started *Mother of Tears*."

Argento, reinvigorated, was finally ready to tackle the film his fans had been clamouring 27 years for. For the script, he collaborated with American screenwriters Adam Gierasch and Jace Anderson (see p.28), whose previous credits include scripting Tobe Hooper's remake of *The Toolbox Murders* (2003) and his direct-to-video zombie schlocker *Mortuary* (2005). Argento met them while shooting *Masters of Horror* and was impressed by their enthusiasm for the ideas he had for a new Three Mothers film.



Never Cross A Witch: Victims of the coven make no yet another [illegible] evil monkey makeup at work

"For this film, I didn't want to work the old way with the same stories," the director explains. "These were new people, and it was interesting for me to work with them. They both came to stay in Rome, and we wrote the screenplay here. We visited churches and the catacombs."

Argento had a firm vision for the story – the city of Rome invaded by witches, led by the titular Third Mother, *Mater Lachrymarum*, known as the Mother of Tears. In Argento's mythology, the Three Mothers are sisters who used witchcraft to gain great wealth and power, and scheme to dominate the world again. The First Mother, *Mater Suspiriorum*, the Mother of Sighs, was vanquished in *Suspiria*; the Second Mother, *Mater Tenebrarum*, the Mother of Darkness, in *Inferno*. The subject matter has long held appeal for the filmmaker, who's a history buff.

"IT WAS MY PURPOSE TO MAKE MOTHER OF TEARS VIOLENT."

Dario Argento

"Witches are fascinating characters," says Argento. "I have never met a witch, but in books I have read some very interesting stories. Many centuries ago they were set on fire and executed by the Inquisition. These were terrible centuries in Italy, Spain and France. The witches knew secrets; there were witches 3000 years before Christ. We see them in old sculptures. Most of the witches – not today, today witches want power and money and to win the fight against good – many centuries ago, the witches were tied to the land. They knew the secrets of herbs, they were like doctors."

For the lead role of Sarah Mandy, who must do battle with the witches to save humankind, Argento turned to his daughter, Asia, an accomplished actor/director in her own right. It was the first time the two had worked together since the ill-received *Phantom of the Opera* (1998).

"I was very happy to have her. We wrote the character for her, for her face, for the energy she has. Sometimes we work together, and then we each go on other roads."

Argento also cast other actors he had worked with in the past, notably Coralina Cataldi-Tassoni (as a researcher), who was in *Opera* and *Phantom of the Opera*; Udo Kier (here as a priest), who had appeared in *Suspiria*; and Daria Nicolodi, Asia's real-life mother and Argento's former common-law wife, as Sarah's mother. The inclusion of Nicolodi, who starred in *Deep Red* (1975) and co-wrote *Suspiria* and *Inferno*, certainly had Argento observers abuzz. When asked about this, Argento is matter-of-fact: "We had the character of the mother of Asia in the film, I chose [Daria] for this character. We worked together for a few days. She is an actress and very professional."

Though his films have always been notable for their beautifully violent set pieces, *Mother of Tears* is far and away Argento's goriest to date. One character is strangled with her own intestines, another is speared through the vagina and there's a cavalcade of decapitations, impalements and various other bodily violations. He lights up when discussing the visceral aspect of the film.

"I love this! It was my purpose to make *Mother of Tears* violent. Real life is like this. I invented something in horror films, some style. I wanted to push beyond my style, to push for more, more, but always within my style. It's the way that I see my movies. I felt free to put in lots of violence and gore."

Argento has long populated his films with characters that have become iconic – Suzy Bannion





JACE ANDERSON DESCRIBES THE PROCESS THAT SHE AND SCREENWRITING PARTNER ADAM GIERASCH UNDERTOOK WHILE COLLABORATING WITH ARGENTO ON HIS LATEST FILM.

GORE, SWEAT AND *Tears*

BY DAVE ALEXANDER

This collaboration actually came about because of Masters of Horror, correct?

That's right. Dario was in town editing [*MoH* episode] "Jenifer" and our buddy Mike Williamson – director of the great short *In the Wall* – was working as an assistant editor. He asked if we wanted to come in and meet Dario, and we jumped at the chance. We came in purely as fans, bringing about four books and DVDs for him to sign. And believe me, we would have been happy to say "hello" and nothing else. But we had a great talk with Dario and soon he was talking about how he was looking for American writers to work on *Mother of Tears*.

Where did you go from there?

After our first meeting we had a long "audition" for the Argentos – Dario and his brother Claudio, who produced *Mother of Tears*. We spent a good month emailing treatments and outlines back and forth. Our agent, lawyer and non-horror friends started telling us we needed a contract and offer before doing any work, but come on – this was Dario! It got to the point where we had a 30-page document outlining the story. We had no idea whether we'd actually move on to writing the script, but one day Claudio called up and said, "We were wondering if you could come to Rome to write the script." There's only one answer to that, and we spent a week scrambling to get our passports together. I guess we'd proved we were willing to work hard, and we did. Sometimes Dario would leave a meeting at our apartment with the command, "You are my slaves! Write! Write!"

You also penned the Toolbox Murders remake and Mortuary for Tobe Hooper – how do the experiences compare?

The main difference is that we wrote *for* Tobe, but *with* Dario. Tobe would, of course, give us extensive notes. But *Mother of Tears* was a true writing collaboration between the two of us and Dario, and it was a blast. We talked through everything before writing anything, and Dario would literally act out scenes for us. As we wrote, we'd turn in sections of the script, which would be translated into Italian. Dario would read them and give notes. When the first draft was done, the whole thing was translated. Dario did a pass in Italian, it was translated back into English, and we did another pass. This continued up until shooting began, although only minor things were being changed at that point.

Did Argento make the film as you originally conceived it?

New ideas come up, things need to be rewritten for locations, etc. But at its core *Mother of Tears* was always about Rome, about Sarah and her search for herself. Even when the plotting order changed, the heart remained the same. And the violence was always violent!

Be honest – how did you feel about being told to include an evil monkey in the plot?

We honestly love the monkey. It's so weird and great, though we can see why some people don't like it. Honestly, we went a little primate crazy on the first draft after Dario announced he wanted a monkey. That damn monkey was everywhere – chasing Sarah through the subway, running up escalator railings, you name it. Dario wisely had us cut it way back. It's funny, long after we wrote it, I was at a museum and noticed a lot of Italian Renaissance paintings of court/noble life, and you often see a monkey in them. Obviously they were kept as pets during that time. I've never asked him about it, but it made me wonder if some of his inspiration came from that. After all, he likes referencing visual art in his movies – there's the whole recreation of Edward Hopper's Nighthawks in *Deep Red*, and the cavern/orgy sequence at the end of *Mother of Tears* was influenced by imagery in Hieronymus Bosch's The Garden of Earthly Delights triptych.

A lot of Argento fans find The Third Mother hopelessly silly, while others appreciate its gore and weirdness. What was Argento aiming for here?

It's probably best to let Dario say what he was trying to accomplish. He did tell us he wanted the movie to be the most violent he'd ever made and he did want it to be about Rome. He never wanted the action to all be centred around one location, like *Suspiria*. I do see the film as a love letter to Rome, in a weird way – but that might be because I fell in love with the city when I was there. Dario was also very clear that he didn't want to repeat the saturated colours of *Suspiria* and *Inferno*. A lot of fans are disappointed about that, but it's a Catch-22 for him: if he'd gone back to that colour palette, he'd have just as many people saying he was repeating old tricks.

(Jessica Harper) in *Suspiria*, Jennifer Corvino (Jennifer Connelly) in *Phenomena*, and Anna Manni (Asia Argento) in *Stendhal Syndrome*. This time, however, one of the most notable characters in the film isn't Asia or any of the other humans; it's an evil little monkey.

"The monkey was a reference to *Phenomena*," chuckles Argento. "But this time the monkey is a witch, an incarnation of a witch. This was my idea, that the monkey was one of the witches."

While *Suspiria* and *Inferno* are signature Argento films, dream-like and full of vivid baroque imagery, *Mother of Tears* is a cinematic extrapolation of his *Masters of Horror* work – fast-paced and immediate – and a deliberate attempt by Argento to retool his style.

"*Suspiria* was really a film about witchcraft," he says. "*Inferno* was much more about alchemy. In this film there is some element of reality, and of the imaginary, of fantasy. The last one was a mixture of these things, but for the first time I introduced an element of contemporary realism, of today."

Despite the implosion of the once-prolific Italian genre film scene in the late '80s – a veritable collapse from which the industry has never recovered – Argento had no problems securing financing for *Mother of Tears*. He attributes this to the enduring popularity of his films around the world.

"*Mother of Tears* was easy," he notes, "but for others it is difficult, as the market is much smaller. For the theatrical market it is not a good time. People say in five or ten years most of the theatres will disappear. The audience now is turning to the internet. Thirty days after a film is released it's on the internet. Another thing is, most of the films today are stupid comedies, ridiculous comedies. Or the Greek heroes fighting, it's not true. They don't respect the real stories, the real history. This is disgusting for me."

Not one to venture into unfamiliar cinematic territory, Argento has been attached to a project titled *Giallo*, which is described as a tribute to the stylized Italian murder mystery genre he helped define in his early films *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (1970) and *Cat O' Nine Tails* (1971). *Variety* reported in January that the story would "revolve around serial slashings of some very attractive women being investigated by a solitary cop, who engages in a cat-and-mouse game with the psychopathic perpetrator." Ray Liotta, Vincent Gallo and Asia Argento were named as the stars, but the status of the project is uncertain. According to Argento, the film has not been cast and has been delayed indefinitely. ("This is an American production. I'm not sure about this film.")

Sadly, Argento remains the definition of a cult filmmaker. Outside of film festivals, it is nearly impossible to experience his grandiose vision on the big screen. *Mother of Tears* enjoyed a small theatrical run in Italy last Halloween and is slated for a limited North American release starting June 6. Fortunately, his filmography has been well represented on DVD, with most of his work available in fantastic special editions. As fans eternally argue the merits of each release, Argento is pleased with how his films have been treated.

"This is good, because they are the director's vision," he says. "It's better than going to the theatre [where] the film is censored. You're at your home, and the film is uncut. When DVD started I was very enthusiastic about it. My films are available all over the world, even in small cities in South America! In every country you can go to, you find my films because with DVD it is easy."



"I WANTED TO PUSH BEYOND MY STYLE, TO PUSH FOR MORE."

Dario Argento

One film, however, remains elusive on DVD, his third, *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* (1971). A recent DVD, released in Germany by RetroFilm, is not official, and Argento is not hopeful that there will be a legitimate version on retail shelves any time soon.

"There is a small problem between my company and Paramount, who was the co-producer," he says. "They made a mistake and don't want to pay for it, so Paramount won't release the film. It's been over twenty years. A friend of mine found the film in Florida, but if it comes out it'll be illegal, I think."

For now, Argento fans will have to settle for the recent release of *Door into Darkness* (see p.30), a series conceived by Argento consisting of four one-hour films made for Italian television in the early '70s, two of which Argento directed.

"People say it is similar to *Masters of Horror*, but it was made for regular television, not pay television or DVD. It was impossible to be as free as with *Masters of Horror*. These films are polite and not so gory, not too much fantasy. They're like old movies."

The big question on the minds of Argento-philes, however, is whether or not the *Third Mother* really is the final film in what was supposed to be a trilogy. Rumours abounded for a time that Argento was considering another installment in the saga of the Three Mothers, but he's quick to dispel them. "For the moment, no more Three Mothers," he states. "The rumour was born because I'm not so happy to abandon this world of witches and magic. I'm happy to stay in this world, on this side of life. For this reason I said to my friends 'OK, I did a trilogy, but maybe it's possible to do four, or five!'"



BACK IN THE '70S, ITALY'S OWN MASTER OF SUSPENSE TRIED TO BRING HIS BRAND OF HITCHCOCKIAN HORROR TO TELEVISION WITH *DOOR INTO DARKNESS*.

DARIO ARGENTO *Presents*

BY MARK R. HASAN

More than 30 years before dropping a couple of gruesome *Masters of Horror* episodes, Dario Argento was dabbling in hour-long TV terror films with *Door into Darkness*. The four episodes from the 1973 show's limited run have long been considered lost holy treasures by Argento fans outside of Italy, who could only procure the grainy, 16mm-shot movies as bootlegs or on a very limited run German DVD set. NoShame Films changes that with its new release of a Region 1 version.

The show was a simple concept whereby Argento could exploit his persona as Italy's own Hitchcock via the small screen. He introduces each installment from a location sort-of related to the episode (sometimes co-mingling with characters), employing a measure of mordant wit. Minus the usual blood striations, awesome nudity and prolonged torment, the episodes had to keep viewers intrigued using strong characters, tight and logical plotting, and a twist payoff. Now, it's not impossible to theorize that a neutered giallo could still hold its own when the running time is almost halved, but with the exception of a singular episode, the remaining three are duds, some possessing amazingly daft writing.



The first episode, *The Neighbor*, is a simple tale of a young couple and their bouncing baby, who move into a ground-level flat one night, only to discover the big hulk living above them has just drowned his wife in the tub.

It was written and directed by Luigi Cozzi, co-writer of Argento's still-unavailable *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* (1971), but unlike the jumbled mix of giallo, Hitchcockian and mystery tropes that were sometimes played for comedy in *Flies*, here Cozzi opts for a straight ode to Hitchcock, going so far as to grey the hair of his bulky bespeckled villain like Raymond Burr in Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, and mimicking Suzie Kendall's trussed-up anguish in Argento's *Bird with the Crystal Plumage*.

Conveniently, the killer's apartment is left unlocked, allowing for snooping, and near the finale he decides to bury the unconscious hubby on a strip of public beachfront (never mind the tide might unmask his inept efforts at concealment). The murderer's scheme to dispose of the wife is equally clumsy, and her fate is determined by a outlandishly-timed event.

Second episode, *The Tram*, was directed by Argento (as "Sirio Bernadotte"), co-written with Cozzi and is the quartet's most satisfying tale, not to mention one of Argento's finest exercises in suspense. Compact and tightly-paced, it begins with the morning discovery of a body during the cleaning of a tram and follows a bull-headed detective as he tries to figure out how someone could be killed in a packed streetcar with no witnesses.

Finger-snapping Commisario Giordani replays every case detail like his favourite jazz solos, constantly looking for a missed nuance as each suspect is crossed off his already short list. Actor Enzo Cerusico (who would later appear in Argento's rarely-seen, underrated political satire *Five Days in Milan* the same year) creates a believable, grounded character, and his mounting frustration ratchets our anticipation as Argento progresses towards a sharp twist that's brilliant in its simplicity. Just as memorable is the modernistic jazz soundtrack by Giorgio Gaslini, who would score the entire quartet, and later co-score *Deep Red* with Goblin.

The third episode, *Eyewitness*, written by Argento and Cozzi, has a woman named Roberta discovering that the chick she's just mowed down with her car on a lonely country road was shot dead moments before. When confronted by the shooter, Roberta flees, and after a quick police investigation, she's given armed protection when the killer's threatening calls extend into the very weekend her husband is out of town. It's pretty freakin' obvious that he's involved.

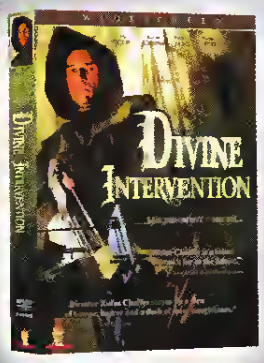
Originally directed by Roberto Pariante (and credited to him), assistant director on Argento's first three films, it was re-shot entirely by Argento, apparently. *Eyewitness* stars another *Milan* alumnus, the vivacious Marilu Tolo, and while she doesn't indulge in any bawdy boffing (a real pity) or display a whipping fetish (see *Bluebeard*), portraying a trembling and weak-willed woman is beneath her fiery style.

The last episode, branded *The Doll*, is a more formal giallo, and was co-written and directed by another *Flies* co-writer, Mario Foglietti. Its intriguing premise of an escaped lunatic trolling the streets and forcing himself into a woman's apartment becomes a confusing mess of bizarre character shifts, capped by a ludicrous twist and psychobabble exchanges hammered into the final act simply to hasten the end crawl. . It's a tragic conclusion to an uneven series that seems to have been conceived as a lark between Argento's feature work. But if three barren gialli were required to beget a career high like *The Tram*, then so be it.

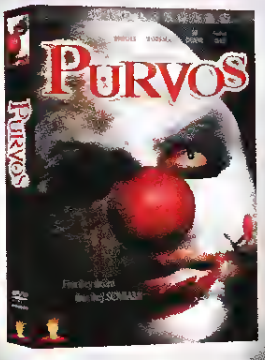
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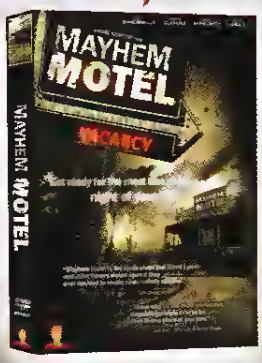
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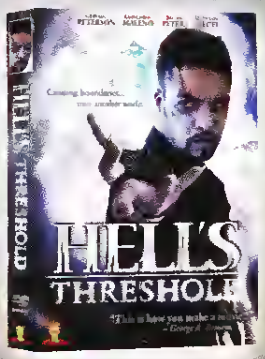
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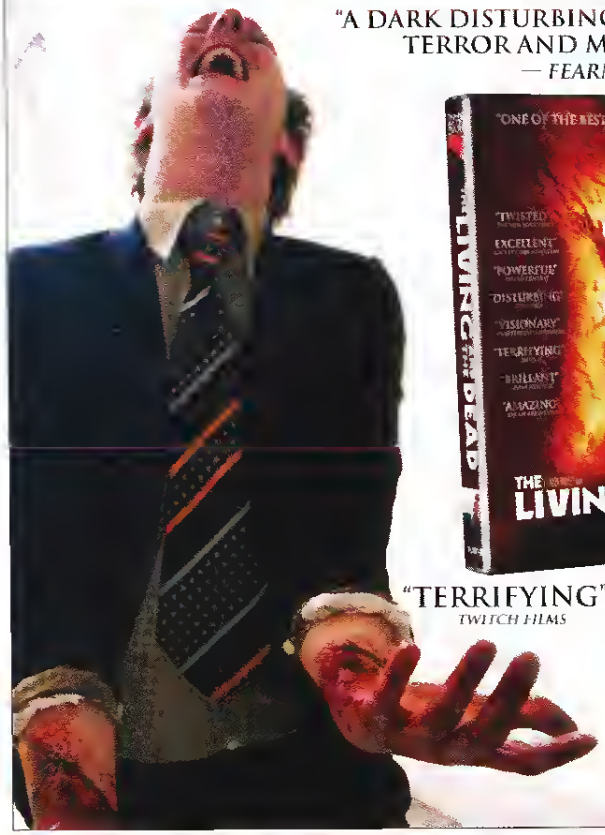
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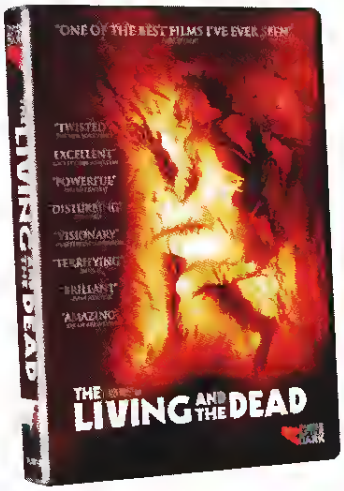
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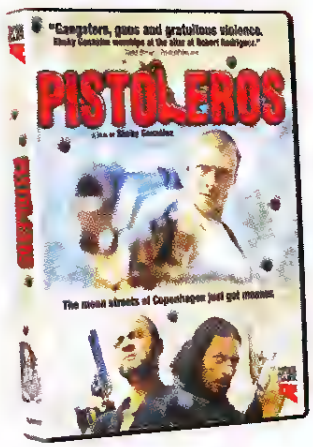


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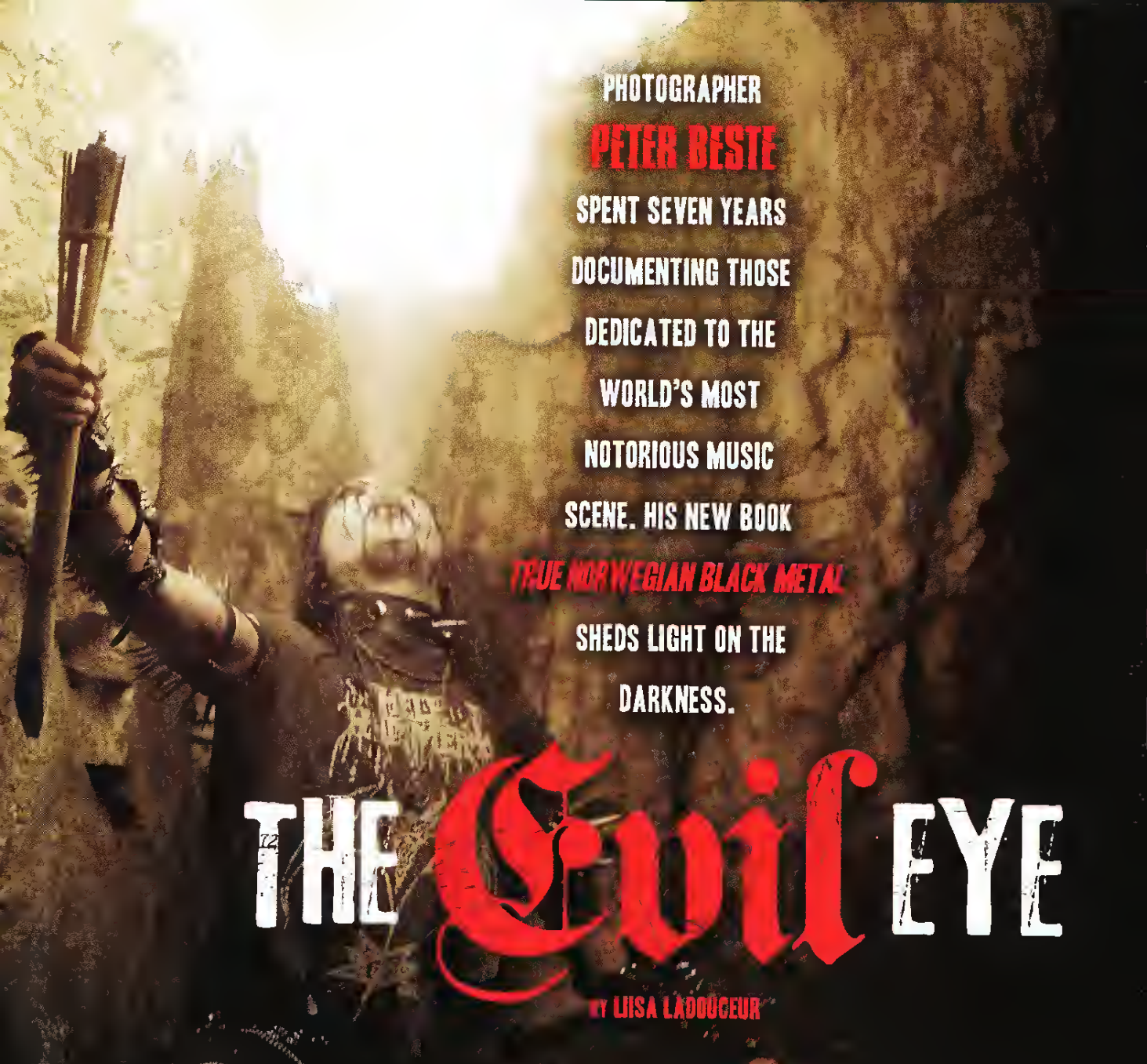
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PHOTOGRAPHER **PETER BESTE** SPENT SEVEN YEARS DOCUMENTING THOSE DEDICATED TO THE WORLD'S MOST NOTORIOUS MUSIC SCENE. HIS NEW BOOK *TRUE NORWEGIAN BLACK METAL* SHEDS LIGHT ON THE DARKNESS.

THE Evil EYE

BY LIISA LADOUCEUR

A ghostly figure with long, warlock-white hair, black paint dripping from his eyes and mouth, stands shirtless on an ordinary cobblestone street, inverted cross tattoo exposed to scornful passersby. The young man, who calls himself Kvitrafn, pierces the otherwise picturesque scene with his horrific face paint, his defiant gaze.

It's not something you see everyday. Unless you're Peter Beste. For seven years, the Brooklyn-based photographer infiltrated the notoriously reclusive Norwegian black metal scene. The images he captured there have become as iconic as the bands themselves, a window into the mysterious hordes of spike-clad anti-Christians who've been the pariahs of metal since the 1990s.

"I got into black metal because I found it really visually interesting," explains Beste. "The evil



"SOME GUYS ONLY WANT TO BE PHOTOGRAPHED WHEN THEY HAVE ALL THEIR PAINT FRESH AND LOOKING ALL SCARY. OTHERS DON'T REALLY CARE."
Peter Beste

Satanic Snapshots: *(clockwise from top) Kvitrafn of Wardrund, King of Gorgoroth, a still from Gorgoroth live show, (inset) Nattefrost, and (opposite) Frost of Satyricon.*

side of it is cool and fun and everything, but it's much more than that. The nature influence really gets me, also the Old Norse mythology. I think it makes it a whole lot more legitimate than if it was just satanic guys burning down churches. It has a cultural significance."

While black metal has hardly been considered high art, Beste's photographs have been exhibited in prestigious galleries around the world (the latest runs from May 8 to June 7 at the Steven Kasher Gallery in New York City). Now, you can enjoy them in your own lair with his first book, *True Norwegian Black Metal* (Vice Books, also available as a deluxe edition limited to 666 copies). It collects more than 100 of Beste's best photographs, mostly black and white portraits or live shots of members of such luminaries of the genre as Emperor, Dimmu Borgir, Mayhem, Darkthrone, Immortal, Satyricon and Gorgoroth.



While many are carefully composed shots that present the subjects as they wish to be seen – sinister and spike-clad, posing – the scariest, most visceral images are those which capture them unaware, smeared and spent after gigs. Trondr from Urgehal might think posing in bondage gear and a bloody machete is freaky, but he's got nothing on Nattefrost passed out in his tub.

"Some guys only want to be photographed when they have all their paint fresh and looking all scary. Others don't really care," Beste reveals. "I'm exploring their public presentation versus their private habitat, which a lot of them let me into, their late night beer drinking in the bedroom. Even the shit-covered bathtub."

Along the way, Beste toured with Mayhem and their severed cows' heads ("It was winter so it wasn't too bad a stink"), and he attended the infamous Gorgoroth gig in Poland, where the 120 decapitated sheep heads and blood-covered nude models hanging from crosses angered authorities. One of the most memorable moments he helped create himself: a photo shoot with Frost of Satyricon breathing fire in a cave.

"We set off in the car and stopped at some mountain side and they lugged these three huge suitcases full of spikes over these sharp rocks as we looked for the opening to this cave Frost remembered from his childhood," recalls Beste. "We lit some torches and went into these caves and photographed for twenty minutes. There were no lights other than the flames. It was pretty black metal."



The book also features archival news clippings and photos from the church-burning days, plus an essay from *Slayer* 'zine founder Metallion, explaining how '80s splatter films such as *Evil Dead* (watched via 10th generation VHS dubs) helped shape the scene.

If Beste's subjects are pure evil or pure theatre is left to the viewer, although he thinks they're both.

"Certain black metal people are more show than real, but more of them are more real than show," says Beste. "I should have brought a sociologist along with me."

For more information on True Norwegian Black Metal *and related photo exhibits, visit peterbeste.com.*





Film, Video, Dvd & Reissues

CINEMACABRE



Funny Games: George (Tim Roth) tears up after taking the pain in Michael Haneke's remake of his own film.

CRY-LARIOUS

FUNNY GAMES

Starring Naomi Watts, Tim Roth
and Michael Pitt
Written and directed by Michael Haneke
Warner Independent Pictures

When the Toronto International Film Festival showed the original *Funny Games* back in 1997, director Michael Haneke introduced the film but begged off the post-screening Q&A because he had a plane to catch. That was probably a good thing, because the audience that endured his bleak tale of a family besieged by home invaders was left bludgeoned, confused and frustrated. It's doubtful whether the Austrian filmmaker would have survived.



For those who have seen the original, there's little reason to catch the director's shot-for-shot English-language remake, unless you're allergic to subtitles. Yes, Tim Roth and Naomi Watts acquit themselves well as the bourgeois parents who unwisely welcome Peter (Brady Corbet) and Paul (Michael Pitt) into their home, although the original cast did an equally fine job in the same roles. But if you haven't seen the original... well, prepare for a perfectly downbeat cinematic experience which actively defies both dramatic convention and audience expectation.

Anna (Watts), George (Roth) and their son are the family at the centre of the action. Why their neighbours won't greet them upon arrival at their summer home is curious. Maybe it has something to do with the young men dressed in white who are with them. Soon enough, one of those young men, Peter, comes asking for eggs on behalf of said neighbours. Anna obliges, but Peter breaks them and "accidentally" drowns her cellphone in the sink. Anna tries to be polite, but matters escalate until George finds himself bludgeoned with his own golf club.

From there, *Funny Games* descends into *Straw Dogs/Deliverance*-style meta-survivalist drama, with our antagonists – and that includes Haneke, who also wrote the film – deconstructing the genre's clichés. Do the hostages threaten their captors with the imminent arrival of neighbours? Yes. Do Peter and Paul humiliate Anne sexually? Yes. Does Anne turn the tables on her captors? Kind of. Haneke never allows us relief, never lets us see the kills, never lets the good guys win.

Indeed, the filmmaker's primary "message" – that the audience is complicit in the crimes we are witnessing because we are watching – is completely contrary to Hollywood expectation. *Funny Games* 2008 allows no respite, no relief, no hope. Is that funny? No. Is it frightening? Yes.

Sean Plummer

NOT-SO-FINE YOUNG CANNIBALS

DOOMSDAY

Starring Rhona Mitra, Craig Conway
and Malcolm McDowell
Written and directed by Neil Marshall
Rogue



Let me start by saying that I absolutely love Neil Marshall in that drooling, geeky, fanboy way that sickens most people at horror conventions. I believe that *Dog Soldiers* and *The Descent* are two of the best horror movies to come out of Britain in the last 50 years and I would defend them to my dying breath. But, as much as I love those films, I absolutely hate *Doomsday*. Painful to say, but painfully true...

Set 25 years after a deadly virus has forced authorities to wall-off the entire country of Scotland, a covert team of scientists led by super sexy Eden Sinclair (Rhona Mitra, *Hollowman*, *Skinwalkers*) journeys to Glasgow to look for a cure after the virus has re-emerged in downtown London. But when the team reaches the city, they're attacked by an army of survivors who have reverted into new wave-listening, Mohawk-wearing cannibals, and must seek the help of an insane scientist, played by McDowell, who is living in a castle like a king in a medieval renaissance fair (honestly).

The entire production is sleek and sexy with terrific sets and wonderfully exotic post-apocalyptic costumes, but it's all style with very little substance. Not even the super-sick special effects and multitudinous buckets of gore hide the fact that Marshall has crammed *Doomsday* so full of homage to films such as *28 Days Later*, *Escape From New York*, *Excalibur* and *The Warriors*, that at times it ceases to be an original movie and instead plays out like a genre highlight reel. Even the adrenaline-fuelled, over-the-top final showdown is little more than a great scene ripped right out of *The Road Warrior*.

In fact, the most one can hope for from *Doomsday* are some fond memories from its fantastic, '80s-influenced soundtrack, which features tunes from Adam and the Ants, Siouxsie and the Banshees and Fine Young Cannibals.

That said, just remember that all of our favourite directors have a major misfire now and then; Romero had *Monkey Shines*, Carpenter had *Ghosts of Mars* and Craven had *Deadly Friend*. Let's just hope that Marshall has had his bomb and now he can move on to better things.

Last Chance Lance

POINTLESS PORTRAIT

SHUTTER

Starring Rachael Taylor, Joshua Jackson and Megumi Okina
Directed by Masayuki Ochiai
Written by Luke Dawson
Fox



We live in a world of recycling, which means that when I'm not pawing through my garbage like a damned raccoon, separating my paper and plastic, I can be found sitting in a movie theatre watching the latest Hollywood rehash of a superior Asian horror film. Joining the ranks of this recent wave of remakes is *Shutter*, which was originally an awesome Thai horror film by directors Banjong Pisanthanakun and Parkpoom Wongpoom (*RM#68*).

The remake stars Joshua Jackson (Pacey from *Dawson's Creek*) and Rachael Taylor (the hot Australian computer nerd from *Transformers*), and was helmed by Japanese director Masayuki Ochiai (*Infection*). Hmm, a Thai film with an American cast made by a Japanese director – sounds like a recipe for disaster.

The movie follows newlyweds Ben (Jackson) and Jane (Taylor) who have moved to Tokyo, where Ben has accepted a job as a fashion photographer. Soon after arriving, they apparently hit and kill a girl with their car, yet the police are unable to find a body. Jane is convinced that they're being haunted by her when strange "spirit images" appear in their photos, and Ben suffers mysterious neck cramps (scary stuff, eh?). She investigates and uncovers a connection between the girl and Ben that leads to a showdown with the restless spirit.

The film moves at the pace of a snail climbing Mount Fuji, with too much time spent on unnecessary, boring character development that doesn't help advance the plot. With the exception of a few jump scares and an over-the-top nod to Hitchcock's *Psycho*, *Shutter* ultimately fails because it lacks any of the supernatural creepiness that made the original so enjoyable.

It's sad that the best thing one can say about Ochiai's direction is that he decided to forego the done-to-death, pasty, long-haired ghost girl look, opting instead to chop her locks at shoulder-length.

As the saying goes, if it ain't broke, don't fix it – to which I'd like to add, don't remake it either.

Last Chance Lance



Shutter: *This time a Thai ghost story gets the ruinous Asian horror remake treatment*

NO, THIS IS THE WORST!

DAY OF THE DEAD

Starring Mena Suvari, Michael Welch and Nick Cannon
Directed by Steve Miner
Written by Jeffrey Reddick
Millennium Films

Did he back over a producer's *lhasa apso*? Burn down his last movie set with a carelessly placed crack pipe? Spit in the face of a vengeful old gypsy woman who asked for an autograph? Goddamn, whatever it was, Steve Miner must've really pissed someone off to get cursed with a project like this *Day of the Dead* remake. In one fell swoop the seasoned director has squandered any horror fan goodwill he had leftover from making *House* and the first two *Friday the 13th* sequels with this latest un-lubed savaging of a Romero title.

Without bemoaning the relevance of a remake, *Day of Dead* is simply an amateurish, cliched, teeny-bopper flick that aggressively ruins everything great about a Romero zombie film. (Yes, to follow up on my *Catacombs* review from two issues ago, *this* is now the worst horror film of the year so far.) The artistic assault begins with a group of small-town teens indulging in the expected horror film activities, but amidst the heavy petting, one of them shows signs of sickness. Meanwhile, the military has cordoned off the town. Ving Rhames, who was in the *Dawn of the Dead* remake, appears briefly as "Rhodes" and the diminutive Mena Suvari stars as the least convincing soldier ever. As a zombie outbreak erupts at the hospital, she rallies a group of survivors, including her younger brother, a comic relief character who dishes irritating pop culture one-liners and "Bud," a soldier turned semi-intelligent zombie who doesn't kill humans because he's – are you sitting down for this? – a gentle vegan.



Not crappy enough for you? Well then how about infected who collectively freeze before turning zombie, instantly take on a rotted appearance and – are you *laying* down for



Deadly End: *An exercise in uncomfortable body horror that doesn't resort to torture porn*

this? – crawl on the ceiling. The Ceiling. Oh yeah, and as the group fights its way to an underground bunker on the outskirts of town, we're also treated to CG gore effects that may have been rendered on an Etch A Sketch. (Did they blow the friggin' squib budget hiring Suvari and Rhames?)

It's easy to see why, say, the neophyte jokers behind *Day of the Dead 2* would try to make a name for themselves on the back of Romero's legacy, but Miner? He's old school, with a reputation of his own, so it's a baffling career choice.

Waitaminute… maybe he's the guy who set those fires in the Hollywood hills last year, because this film certainly feels like punishment for a very bad deed.

Dave Alexander

BUT ON THE FLIPSIDE...

DEADLY END

Starring Jack Huston, Pell James and Nick Searcy
Written and directed by Graeme Whifler
Full Moon

In our March issue I pronounced *Hack!* the top contender for worst horror film of 2008, despite it being so early in the year. (In the same issue, Dave Alexander tagged *Catacombs* for similar dishonours, but clearly these things change.) Depressing, yes, but here's the flipside: early as it is even now, I may just have seen this year's best indie horror film, *Deadly End*, a.k.a. *Neighborhood Watch*. (Although it's actually been in the can several years and is just now getting a proper release.)

If the name Graeme Whifler is unfamiliar to many of you, the writer/director is nonetheless beloved by fans of the Residents, having directed several of the '90s art-rock group's videos included in the 2001 *Icky Flix* compilation. In *Deadly End*, he spins a darkly satirical tale of a young couple (played by Jack Huston and Pell James) who run afoul of some very strange neighbours after they move into a drab bungalow in a drab subdivision. One particularly overbearing and crusty creep (Nick Searcy) tries to ingratiate himself with the couple, who politely rebuff his advances but soon suspect that he's slowly poisoning them. The film could be described as equal parts *Neighbors*, *The Tenant* and John Landis' *Masters of Horror* episode *Family* (but made before it), with hints of *The Amityville Horror*'s home ownership nightmare, but that's not to say *Deadly End* doesn't stand on its own. To call it a gross-out film would also be accurate, but if that sounds like a dismissal, it's most certainly not. Whifler has a talent for delivering truly cringe-inducing visuals without resorting to tired-ass torture porn clichés. Without giving specifics away, let's just say the excruciating climactic scene gives Douglas Buck's *Cutting Moments* a run for its money. Jack Huston (grandson of legendary director John Huston) is especially compelling as our beleaguered hero, and Searcy turns in a performance of studied skeeziness that would do Joe Spinell proud.



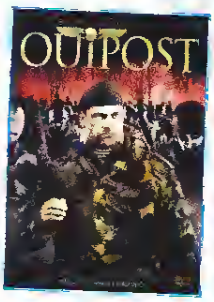
Low budget and of admittedly limited appeal to anyone outside the hardcore horror audience, I'll be shocked if *Deadly End* doesn't accumulate a small but rabid following over the next couple of years. Besides, any movie bearing the Full Moon imprint these days with nary a puppet in sight must have you curious. Well, doesn't it?

John W. Bowen

PITY THE FOOL WHO MISSES THIS ONE

OUTPOST

Starring Ray Stevenson, Richard Brake and Julian Wadham
Directed by Steve Barker
Written by Rae Brunton
Columbia/Tristar



Confession time: as a youngster I was obsessed with the *A-Team* to the point of dressing up in camouflage and shooting a toy gun at the TV screen every time the show came on. I had all the toys, ate Mr. T cereal and even recorded the opening credit music on an old tape player. Massive gold chains, black boogie vans and network TV antics notwithstanding, a small group of well-armed military types facing danger and kicking ass also has made for some righteous supernatural dust-ups, with werewolves (*Dog Soldiers*), aliens (*Predator*), zombies (the first *Resident Evil*), ghosts (*R-Point*) and more aliens (*Aliens*).

Outpost, the first feature from British director Steve Barker, takes this concept to wartorn Eastern Europe. Here, a group of mercenaries is assembled to guide a scientist on a very secret mission to find an old military bunker. Once there, they discover not only a room full of bodies – including one live and extremely creepy mute – but that the site was a former Nazi research centre involving a machine with inter-dimensional capabilities. As the increasingly shifty scientist works on firing up the device, the men come under attack from a force not quite like anything you've seen in a horror film before. To avoid spoilers, let's just say that the device isn't Hitler's lost tickle machine and the invaders haven't come to apologize for World War II.

A few unlikely plot conveniences (e.g. a generator that still works and a stunningly preserved film reel explaining the back story) and a climax that dilutes the horror by over-explaining everything, will induce involuntary eye-rolling, unfortunately. While not quite a classic, *Outpost* definitely falls into overlooked gem territory. It's relentlessly tense with more than a few chilling moments

and well-executed jump scares that make the most of the film's shadowy, airless setting. Barker's got chops behind the camera and his cast is unexpectedly good in front of it. Instead of a collection of tough-guy clichés, they're a believable bunch of hardened soldiers from around the world, thanks in no small part to screenwriter Rae Brunton's dialogue.

Take it from a grown man who still has a Mr T action figure commingling with his horror toys: until the A-Team goes toe-to-tentacle with Cthulhu, *Outpost* will do just fine.

Dave Alexander



Shrooms: *Tara (Lindsay Haun) suffers the effects of Irish fungus*

FUNGICIDE

SHROOMS

Starring Lindsey Haun, Jack Huston and Max Kasch
Directed by Paddy Breathnach
Written by Pearse Elliott
Magnolia



The premise of *Shrooms*, though astonishingly unrealistic, is simple: five American teenagers travel to Ireland for what this Irish bloke, Jake, promises will be a magic mushroom-fuelled trip of a lifetime. An expert in the fungal arts, Jake leads the group deep into the forest during "'shroom season" and verses them in the dos and don'ts of the local agriculture.

He tells of the mysterious "indigenous people," slobbering forest dwellers with as many teeth as I.Q. points, and strange incidents that have been reported up here in *these very woods*. But most of all, the 'shroom shaman warns about the "Death's Head Fungi" – a mushroom that reportedly grants the taster the ability to cross into other dimensions, communicate with the dead, experience foresight and shape-shift. Insert your own Grateful Dead joke here.

Shunning the threat of possible death upon ingestion, the lightweight of the group, Tara (Lindsey Haun), eats one of the little black suckers, while the rest of the gang sticks to the regular garden variety, and so the adventure begins. The paranoia is obviously on high, with Tara periodically experiencing crippling hallucinations/premonitions that set up the axis upon which the rest of the movie turns. She sees everyone die before they actually do and runs around, in vain, trying to save them from their date with death. The usual horror clichés kick in here as one by one the cast members get picked off by a cloaked druid who is never really explained, but since the sorry lot are never sure whether what they're seeing is real or imagined, it doesn't feel like a deal-breaker.

The deaths and hallucinations don't reveal much in their choppily edited, music video-style chaos but you'll still get a buzz from the nifty photography and a few choice scenes – one involving a talking cow made me check to make sure my diary hadn't been stolen, and another included the line this movie absolutely had to have: "I wish I hadn't taken those 'shrooms." When the end credits rolled, I couldn't say the same.

Trevor Tuminski

NOT SO HOT

FURNACE

Starring Michael Paré, Jeffery "Ja Rule" Atkins and Jenny McShane
Directed by William Butler
Written by William Butler, Aaron Stongoni and Scott Aronson
Melee

After starring in *Texas Chainsaw Massacre III* and *Night of the Living Dead* (1990), not to mention providing FX work on *From Beyond*, it's safe to say that William Butler is a true disciple of the genre, though that dedication hasn't given him much success as a writer/director. He co-scripted those two awful recent *Return of the Living Dead* sequels, and now in the director's chair he's throwing down movies like *Furnace*, a hopelessly dull straight-to-DVD clunker that fails to capitalize on the inherent creepiness of its own premise: a haunted prison.

After a prison guard comes home and inexplicably commits suicide, detective Michael Turner (Michael Paré), a stereotypical lonely cop with a haunted past, is called in to investigate. Turns out an old wing of the maximum-security prison has recently been reopened, and anyone who goes near it ends up in a body bag soon after. The culprit? A dark-haired ghost girl straight out of *The Ring*. Only instead of a well, it's a furnace, and she's about as scary as Dora the Explorer.



Paré sleepwalks through his role, which is to be expected with a script this lame, and Ja Rule and Danny Trejo have meaningless bit parts, likely created as an excuse to have them on the DVD cover. Only Tom Size-





Furnace: *Ripping off J horror with a ghost girl who's burned rather than drowned*

more adds a spark as a corrupt guard who, of course, has a history with Pare's character.

All in all, *Furnace* is so thoroughly generic, you can literally doze off for twenty minutes of it and not miss a beat. And just how lazy is the script? The final secret is revealed by an extended hallucinatory sequence that comes out of nowhere, playing out previous events in detail for Turner. Whew! Lucky for him, otherwise he would've been on this crappy case all year.

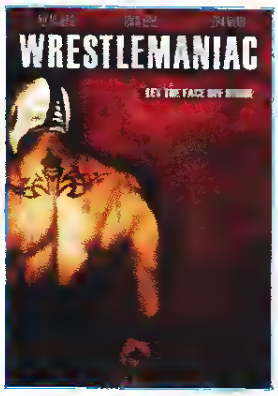
Aaron Von Lupton

GRAPPLING WITH GARBAGE

WRESTLEMANIAC

Starring Rey Misterio Sr., Leyla Razzari and Adam Huss
Written and directed by Jesse Baget
Anchor Bay

Tucked firmly in the greasy, spandex-wrapped nether region between gladiatorial combat and gay porn rests the "sports entertainment" phenomenon of professional wrestling, wherein guys in trucker caps and NASCAR shirts get increasingly ecstatic at the spectacle of mostly naked men, muscles glistening with baby oil, gripping each other tightly on pay-per-view while Toby Keith plays in the background.



But there's wrestling, mi amigos, and then there's Mexican wrestling, a genuine macho sport which spawned such legendary luchadores as El Santo, Mil Máscaras and The Blue Demon. Their epic confrontations in the squared circle soon led to literally hundreds of cinematic showdowns against vampires, werewolves, robots and Aztec mummies.

Sadly, there are Mexican wrestling movies, and then there's *Wrestlemaniac*.

Ham-fistedly fusing elements of horror, lucha libre and amateur porn in ways guaranteed to frustrate fans of all three, *Wrestlemaniac* starts with the lowest common denominator then immediately begins digging. After opening with a detailed description of the mythical sex practice known as the Dirty Sanchez by a guy who looks to be the recent recipient of one, we meet the least sympathetic characters this side of an Eli Roth movie: an amateur porn crew waylaid en route to Cabo San Lucas (actual nudity is restricted to some briefly-flashed breasts, making this setup both sleazy and a tease). Trapped in the deserted village of El Sangre De Dios, they're soon thankfully dispatched one-by-one by hastily explained mad masked wrestler "El Mascarado" – not nearly as fast as you'd like.

Heavily promoted as the star in the box art, *Wrestlemaniac* features very little of luchadore Rey Misterio Sr. (or, for that matter, much in the way of actual wrestling). Misterio doesn't even appear on camera until well past the halfway point of the film's scant 71-minute running time. Apparently even he had better things to do than show up for this piece of shit.

If there were any justice in the world, the silver-masked ghost of El Santo himself would appear to deliver a flying drop kick on writer/director Jesse Baget. Followed immediately by a – yes – Dirty Sanchez.

Joseph O'Brien

DON'T LISTEN TO FRANCO

NATURE MORTE

Starring Troy McFadden, Carole Derrien and Laurent Guyon
Written and directed by Paul Burrows
Salvation Films

Nature Morte (*Still Life*) is one of those films that almost defies description. The terms sleazy, artful, erotic, minimalist, Euro-trash, amateurish and pornographic all apply and yet arguably do nothing to properly categorize it.

It follows Oliver Davenport, an American art expert helping French police discover the motives behind a series of brutal sex murders and art forgeries that may be connected. His investigation leads him to an island off the coast of Thailand, where he encounters a group of rich, hedonistic weirdos who invite him into their world of experimental art, limitless drugs and free sex.

Paul Burrows' directorial debut proves to be an uneven mess immersed in surreal, drug-fuelled imagery and plagued by horribly amateurish acting. It continually defies itself at every turn, starting off as a bizarre, erotic giallo, then morphing into a formulaic police procedural, only to finish off as a lame-ass murder mystery with hints towards a never-explained supernatural connection.



Burrows has quite clearly stated that he had never even been on a film set before making *Nature Morte*, his inexperience shows as he consistently sacrifices attempts to advance the paper-thin plot by trying to be hyper-stylish, with scene after scene of drug-addled depravity and luscious lesbian beauties clad in tight-fitting latex.

Other than a standout performance by Carole Derrien in the role of the sexy, depraved and villainous Blanche, the soundtrack is the only saving grace of the entire film. Former Siouxsie and the Banshees founder Steven Severin and his wife Arban manage to put together an appealing and appropriately eerie soundtrack that is really much, much better than this movie deserves.

Nature Morte may have been described as "insane and beautiful" by director Jess Franco but you can quote me as saying that it's just plain insane.

Last Chance Lance

TAKE A COLD SHOWER, STU!

THE BACKWOODS

Starring Gary Oldman, Paddy Considine and Aitana Sánchez-Gijón
Directed by Koldo Serra
Written by Jon Sagalá and Koldo Serra
Lionsgate

I'm not embarrassed to admit that I have great man-love for Gary Oldman. And while it sucks to see him in substandard, empty-headed fare such as *The Backwoods*, I'm persuaded to forgive him, because what man in his right mind would pass up the chance to star alongside the outrageously picturesque Virginie Ledoyen (Leonardo DiCaprio's bikini-clad French playmate in Danny Boyle's *The Beach*)? Joining them is British actor Paddy Considine (*Hot Fuzz*) and Italian beauty Aitana Sánchez-Gijón (*The Machinist*), who help infuse *The Backwoods* with a curiously pleasant admixture of European flavours.



Set in the summer of 1978, this shameless *Straw Dogs* rip-off recounts the misadventures of a pair of couples who drive up to rural Northern Spain for what they mistakenly assume will be a relaxing vacation.

Upon arriving at their destination, the men waste no time in proving their masculinity by grabbing a couple of double-barrelled shotguns to hunt bunny wabbits. While traversing the woods, they happen upon a mysterious cottage containing a deranged girl with deformed hands. In an act of misplaced compassion that's sure to go punished by the gods, they take her back to their cabin, it isn't long before drooling, armed local hillbillies come a-knocking. To throw them off the scent, the two men join the hunting party while the women stay at home to hide the child, but given the European eye candy on display, it's no surprise that a couple of the mouth-breathers double back to pay the ladies *the old surprise visit*.

At this point, any reasonably astute genre fan could conjure up a gazillion scenarios of satisfying sadism, and given its shameless plundering of Sam Peckinpah's 1971 masterpiece, we'd expect nothing less than a crescendo of mind-numbing violence. Unfortunately, such possibilities are diffused almost as quickly as they're suggested, and this is the great failing of *The Backwoods*. While it's beautifully made and masterfully stylized, it never lives up to the perverse promise of its pre-worn premise. The sight of Ledoyen in a see-through blouse isn't the only thing that leaves us with a case of blue balls.

Stuart F. Andrews



OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE DUNKS HIS TRUNKS

DEBBIE DOES ROSEBUD

BIKINI BLOODBATH

Brightly Entertainment



The only reason this DVD isn't propping up the short leg on my desk is because of two little words emblazoned on the cover: "Debbie Rochon!" My all-time favourite Canadian scream queen (next to the late Fay Wray, of course) stars as a pervy high school gym teacher in this off-beat parody that features a killer – who looks like *The Muppet Show*'s Swedish Chef on steroids – carving up sexy airheads at their high school graduation hot tub party. Although it clocks in at just over an hour, has a lousy soundtrack and seems to be shot with spooge on the camera lens, *Bikini Bloodbath* is campy fun. And it features Rochon in a *Citizen Kane*-inspired, lesbian-themed death scene that may be her best onscreen finale yet.

Body Count: 11
Time 'Til First Topless Girl: 1:09

I LOVE MUNDAES

SPLATTER BEACH

Camp Motion Pictures



I've long followed the career of Misty Mundae with the passion of a Cub Scout hoping to earn his pervert badge, and even though she now goes by her more "respectable" birth name, Erin Brown, I gleefully sat down to watch her star in the Polonia Brothers' campy take on Roger Corman's *Humanoids From the Deep*. In it, she plays a girl trying to warn locals about a group of sea creatures that plan on turning them into a beach buffet. Although the film suffers from some shaky bluescreen effects and the distressing fact that Misty/Erin's clothes stay on, it's still a cool movie with great creature costumes, decent gore effects and a terrific retro rock 'n' roll soundtrack. Annette Funicello – eat your heart out!

Body Count: 11
Time 'Til First Topless Girl: 1:42

INBREEDING MEETS CROSS-BREEDING

CREATURE FROM THE HILLBILLY LAGOON

Shock-O-Rama Cinema



Inbred rednecks, mutated fish creatures and mad science? Wow... WOW! Talk about sweetening the deal! *Creature from the Hillbilly Lagoon* (a.k.a. *Seepage!*) even chucks in a group of clueless, sexy college kids, sent to said lagoon to test for toxic contamination, but who spend most of their time skinny-dipping in the murky water. Here they're attacked by amphibious mutant fish with razor-sharp teeth, stereotypical hillbillies ("Bubba" and "Cooter," naturally) and some weirdo researchers intent on breeding a race of superior sea creatures. The result is a tight, well-written production loaded with great gore, some sweet rubber suit costumes and very creative comic book-style cut scenes. So grab your Speedo, strap on your shotgun and head on down to the Hillbilly Lagoon!

Body Count: 19
Time 'Til First Topless Girl: 1:42

CINEMACABRE PRESENTS

Indie and D.I.Y. films reviewed

Blood on a Budget

Reviews by Stuart F. Andrews, Paul Corupe and Last Chance Lance

Pop Skull

popskullthemovie.com



Pop Skull is an interesting case study; it's a weird mixture of the truly incredible infused with the utterly unwatchable. The man responsible is Alabama-based auteur and wunderkind, Adam Wingard. He was only 22 when he directed his first feature, 2004's *Home Sick* (starring Bill Moseley and Tiffany Shepis), but it's his 2007 sophomoric effort which will assure him a place in the pantheon of camcorder Coppolas.

With *Pop Skull* – shot on DV with a volunteer cast and crew on a $3000 budget – Wingard demolishes the wall of apologies and technical excuses that no-budget neophytes typically hide behind. He confidently wields carefully composed images, hallucinatory editing techniques and a densely textured sound design to plunge us deep into the dismal world of Daniel (co-writer Lane Hughes). After getting dumped, the emo rocker-wannabe spirals into a vortex of self-pitying, pill-popping derangement complete with hyper-violent fantasies and the occasional ghostly apparition.

Unfortunately, everything that makes *Pop Skull* initially intriguing becomes irritating as it descends into film school wankery. And Daniel is such an aggravating whiner that it's a challenge sit through this without hate-fucking the fast forward button. Still, Wingard (who shot, directed and edited the flick) possesses that rare, dream-like, Lynchian gift of conjuring cinematic interior landscapes. I can't wait to see what he'll do with better material. **SFA**



The Wild Man of the Navidad

wildmanofthenavidad.com

Directed by Duane Graves and Justin Meeks, and co-produced by *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* co-writer Kim Henkel, this slow-burning creature feature does an admirable job at capturing the seedy, inscrutable ambience of the Bigfoot film boom of the 1970s. Based on a long-standing local legend, *The Wild Man of the Navidad* stars Meeks as Dale S. Rogers, a poor welder who tends to the needs of his crippled wife, all the while keeping a hairy, violent man-creature who lives in the woods behind his shack at bay. When Rogers loses his job, however, he's forced to open up his potentially dangerous property to well-heeled hunters in order to afford his wife's pills.



Shot in the sleepy community of Sublime, Texas, and spiced with a good measure of redneck colour, *The Wild Man of the Navidad* succeeds mostly on the strength of Meeks' low-key performance as Rogers, whose journals and accounts supposedly formed the basis of this film. Whether you believe there's any truth to *Wild Man* or not, there's no denying that this is a well-shot, Southern spook show throwback that passes up aggressive scares for pure atmosphere – you can almost hear the black flies buzzing and feel the blast of hot Sasquatch breath down the back of your neck. **PC**

Psycho Ward

psychowardthemovie.com

Just once I'd like to see a horror movie about an abandoned hospital, mental institution or prison that doesn't involve a maniac stalking the unsuspecting people who break into it. Then again, that would probably be pretty boring, wouldn't it?

Even though *Psycho Ward* features a documentary film crew that ventures inside an abandoned mental hospital and is hunted down by a hulking, mute, masked, power tool-wielding lunatic, it proves to be anything but boring, as the crew members must pool their skills to unlock a secret and escape the killer. Sure, it contains many cliches of mental hospital slasher flicks, but it's still a solid, highly entertaining film with tasteful nudity, fantastic locations and some great gore. My only complaint is the abusive soundtrack, which is so horribly percussive at times that it detracts from an otherwise pleasurable viewing experience.



Director Patrick McBrearty's directorial debut has got to be one of the best indie films I've seen in years in terms of its production value and the fact that he was able to illicit some solid performances from a group of amateur actors who had the great fortune to be working with a competent script.

For a first-time effort, this is worth getting locked away for. **LCL**

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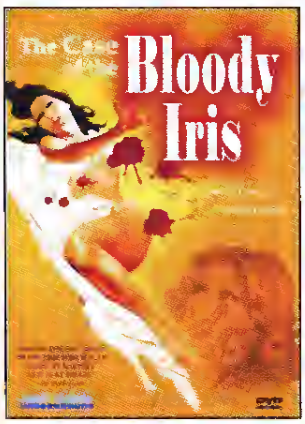
The Case of the Bloody Iris: An elevator kill that seemingly inspired De Palma's **Dressed to Kill**.

SEXY, STYLISH, SLEAZY

THE CASE OF THE BLOODY IRIS (1972)

Starring Edwige Fenech, George Hilton and Paola Quattrini
Directed by Anthony Ascott
Written by Ernesto Gastaldi
Blue Underground

You have to hand it to the Italians. Back in the '60s and '70s, they definitely knew how to put out effectively sexy yet brutally bloody little films, of which *The Case of the Bloody Iris* (a.k.a. *Erotic Blue*, *What Are Those Strange Drops of Blood Doing on Jennifer's Body?*) is among the best. Director Giuliano Carnimeo (here under the pseudonym Anthony Ascott) takes a break from spaghetti westerns to plunge into giallo territory with this deliciously kinky and stylishly lensed tale.



Euro-fave Edwige Fenech stars as a beautiful model named Jennifer, who moves into a posh high-rise apartment that was the scene of two brutal murders. After taking up residence in the unit belonging to one of the victims – a young model (and erotic wrestling performer in a sleazy "men's club") – she finds herself relentlessly stalked by a rubber glove-wearing murderer. Is the killer Jennifer's jealous and controlling ex-husband who wants to pull her back into the orgiastic sex-cult she was once part of? Her elderly neighbour's hideously deformed son? A mysterious female neighbour with a penchant for young, attractive ladies? Or the building's handsome but squeamish architect (George Hilton), who she's falling in love with?

Scripted by Ernesto Gastaldi (*The Horrible Dr. Hitchcock*, *The Whip and the Body*), the plot features several red herrings and some genuinely effective death scenes, including the slashing of a prostitute in an elevator, which seems to have been lifted by Brian De Palma for *Dressed to Kill*.

Fenech, while beautiful, is not much of a thespian, nor is Hilton as the cardboard hero. The stilted performances are made up for, though, by eye-catching psychedelic kaleidoscopic lens effects, zooms and point-of-view shots, plenty of undressed young models and a groovy jazz score by Bruno Nicolai (Jess Franco's *Count Dracula* and *Lizard in a Woman's Skin*, and Dario Argento's *Bird with the Crystal Plumage* and *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*).

Although not quite on the scale of, say, a Bava or Argento picture, *The Case of the Bloody Iris* holds its own in the giallo genre. If you picked it up when Anchor Bay previously reissued it, Blue Underground offers the same handful of extras. If not, it's time to get acquainted with this sleazy, stylish and inventively twisted little thriller.

James Burrell

DULL EDGE OF THE BLADE

SWEENEY TODD: THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET (1936)

Starring Tod Slaughter, Stella Rho and Bruce Seton
Directed by George King
Written by George Dibdin-Pitt, Frederick Hayward and H.F. Maltby
Legend House

Although hailed as the British counterpart of icons Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi, theatre actor Tod Slaughter has remained a relatively minor figure in the history of horror. Slaughter performed in a handful of killer-themed melodramas until his death in 1956, but, like Lugosi he was best known for a role he had recreated countless times on stage: Sweeney Todd. When homegrown film quotas were introduced in England to balance out the overwhelming Hollywood imports, Slaughter was called upon by slapdash director George King to resurrect his bloodthirsty barber for *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*.

In this, the first sound adaptation of the story, the self-centred Todd robs and murders prosperous seafaring gentlemen with the help of a specially rigged barber's chair and a straight razor. For a slice of the proceeds, Mrs. Lovett (Stella Rho) then disposes of the victims by getting rid of the evidence in her meat pies. Conflict arises

when a sailor, Mark (Bruce Scton), returns to marry his sweetheart Johanna (Eve Lister), the young girl Todd is intent on making his own wife.

Emphasizing melodrama over horror, *Sweeney Todd* is a surprisingly tame film that only hints at the grisly deeds of Todd and Lovett, all of which occur offscreen. Instead, the film's only real macabre touch is a streak of black humour. Todd manages an uneasy grin through comments such as, "I love my work!" as he promises each shaving cream-lathered customer that he will soon "polish them off."

These add a nice touch to the story, but Slaughter's broadly delivered one-liners also illustrate why the actor never became as prominent as Karloff and Lugosi. He simply refuses to adapt to the more intimate medium of film and relies on the same big gestures, booming voice and moustache-twirling villainy that made him famous on stage. This lack of subtlety gives the film a cheap, one-dimensional quality that keeps it from becoming a true classic of the genre.



Packaged as a double-feature disc with the far less interesting thriller *Crimes at the Dark House*, this release of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet* from Legend House may not be essential, but it will satisfy the curiosity of all those who have yet to experience Tod Slaughter's bold theatrics.

Paul Corupe

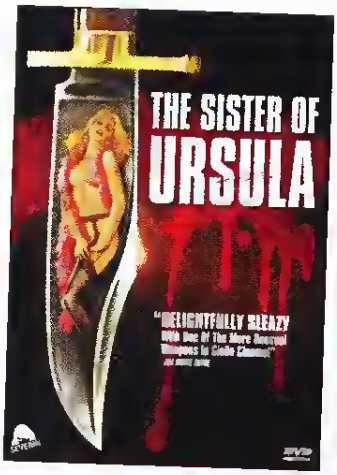
HOW LOW CAN YOU GIALLO?

THE SISTER OF URSULA (1978)

Starring Barbara Magnolfi, Stefania D'Amario and Vanni Meterassi
Written and directed by Enzo Milioni
Severin

There are some claims that I'm sure only *Rue Morgue* writers (and perhaps a select few others) can make, and here's my latest. *The Sister of Ursula* is actually the second killer-dildo movie I've seen in less than a year (the other, for the record, was *Splatter Farm*). Even as dubious accomplishments go, that's kind of remarkable. More remarkable, at any rate, than anything about this plodding, by-the-numbers, late-era giallo.

Gorgeous Dagmar (Stefania D'Amario, best known to *RM* readers as Nurse Missey in Fulci's *Zombie*) and her insufferable, snaggle-toothed, drama queen sister Ursula (Barbara Magnolfi, previously seen in *Suspiria*) check into a picturesque Mediterranean resort for some R&R, but Ursula persistently harshes the buzz with her "visions" of murder and mayhem. Sure enough, there's a black-gloved killer skulking about the place offing people after they have sex, and utilizing the aforementioned pseudo-schlong to dispatch the shrieking females. (In typical giallo fashion, none of the victims ever seem to think of defending themselves, or even running away. I mean, come on!) Of course, all these folks actually have to finish having sex before getting killed, and that kind of thing takes time. So what does that leave us? A giallo with even more sex than usual? A softcore porn film that wishes it were *Deep Red*? I'm bollocksed if I know, or care.



The already dead-slow plot development takes a back seat to undulating flesh as one tedious simulated sex scene follows another, including the most atrociously faked blowjob ever committed to celluloid. Granted, there are some spectacular beauties on display here, and they're naked as often as not – Stefania D'Amario in particular seems determined to drop her kit every ten minutes or so – but as I've asserted before in issues past, if you can bore me with this much gratuitous nudity, you're doing something seriously wrong. For all these reasons and more, Gentle Reader, if you see only one killer-dildo movie this year, don't see this one.

John W. Bowen



The Sister of Ursula *An otherwise standard giallo featuring a deadly dildo (not pictured)*

DON'T GET ANY ON YA

SEX SLAVES OF THE S.S. (1972)

After Hours Cinema

Hoping to cash in on the hype surrounding last year's release of Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez's homage to grubby '70s cinema, *Grindhouse*, numerous DVD distributors repackaged their existing drive-in titles or slapped worn-out VHS masters onto shiny discs and put them out as grindhouse collections. However, these releases ignored the principal attraction of the rundown inner-city theatres that inspired the film and the fad: hardcore sex films. After Hours Cinema is filling this, er, gaping hole.

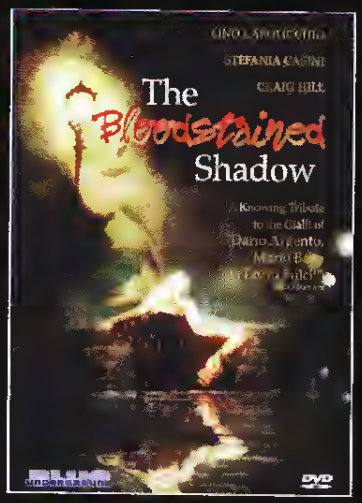
Sex Slaves of the S.S., (a.k.a. *Nazi Sex Experiments*), has neither a title card or production credits, and has been "enhanced" by After Hours to resemble the Italian Nazisploitation films of the late '70s. Dr. Ivan Cock-Luv, and his sexually ambiguous assis-



MORE MURDER

THE BLOODSTAINED SHADOW (1978)

Starring Lino Capolicchio, Stefania Casini and Craig Hill
Directed by Antonio Bido
Written by Marisa Andalo, Antonio Bido and Domenico Malan
Blue Underground



When Antonio Bido's second giallo film, *The Bloodstained Shadow* (a.k.a. *Solamente Nero*), was released in 1978, the golden age of gialli was near an end. Masters of the genre had begun to move on; with *Suspiria*, Dario Argento turned to supernatural terror; Lucio Fulci was about to explore extreme gore with *Zombie*; and Mario Bava, having not made a giallo since 1970, was simply a decade ahead of everybody. So the fact that *The Bloodstained Shadow* isn't the most original film of its ilk is not surprising. But what is surprising is the mastery with which Bido uses his influences to resample the best of genre and twist its conventions to make a giallo that feels fresh.

Lino Capolicchio (*The House With the Laughing Windows*) is young college professor Stefano, who returns home to Venice to visit his brother, Don Paolo, a Catholic priest (Craig Hill, *Dracula vs. Frankenstein*). When Paolo witnesses a murder, he begins to receive threatening letters. To protect his brother, Stefano turns amateur sleuth, teaming up with the antique dealer next door, Sandra (Stefania Casini from *Suspiria*). Of course, the black-gloved killer doesn't want to be discovered and the bodies start to pile up around them.

The film features gloriously staged murders and scenes of doll abuse. What disturbs is not that we feel for the doll as its limbs are torn off or its glass eyes are gouged out, it's the absolute delight a feeble-minded man-child exhibits as his mother attempts to console him by punishing his bad little dolly.

In addition to all this, *The Bloodstained Shadow* boasts one of the best film scores of the era. In a best-of-both-worlds pairing, the music was composed by Stelvio Cipriani, then arranged and performed by an uncredited Goblin.

It's a shame that Antonio Bido hasn't made more gialli. In fact he's made very few films since *The Bloodstained Shadow*, instead choosing to work on documentaries. But he has recently surfaced on the Internet claiming a desire to return to the genre, and even has a script, *Il Tarlo Del Male* (*The Worm of Evil*), co-authored with his wife and writing partner from *The Bloodstained Shadow*. Hopefully it's a film worth waiting for.

Jason Pichonsky

tant Fritz (a petite middle-aged woman with a mustache glued to her lip), mug it up as researchers on female sexual response for the Third Reich in the waning days of WWII. They are given three American female prisoners to experiment on, however, instead of the usual sado-masocistic deeds that the subgenre promises, several tepid, poorly filmed sex scenes and silent 8mm inserts ensue before the captives are liberated by the US Army.

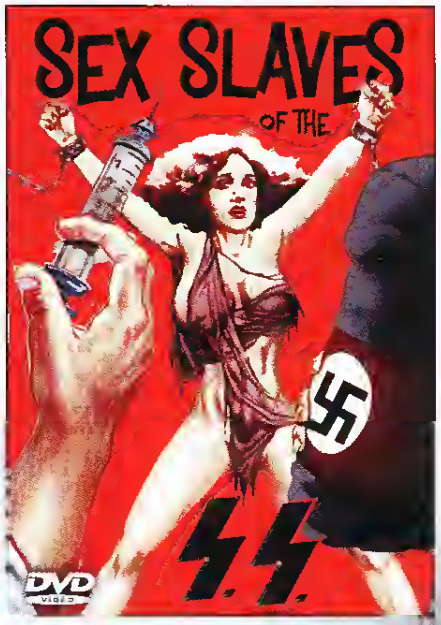
Talk about your poverty-stricken porn! The action takes place on two sets, a laboratory with a giant cardboard computer that threatens to fly apart at any second, and a small cell to hold the girls in. The only atrocity on display is the cinematography. A showcase lesbian scene looks as if it was filmed by a cameraman hanging by one arm from the rafters!

A second smut obscurity, *Woman of Vengeance*, is included on a bonus disc. A wife, who is having an affair with an employee at her unfaithful husband's bike shop, hires a hit man to get rid of him, but the murder plot goes awry. This one features more conventional hardcore action, and a decidedly downbeat climax.

Both features are taken from battered film elements, which only bolster their allure. Between the two discs, there are some 30 trailers included as extras, making for a large and satisfying package (heh).

As erotica, this set will hardly have you fumbling for your zipper, but as a window into the dingy sin palaces of lore, they are as authentic an experience as you're likely to get without having to fend off the clumsy clutches of strangers in the dark.

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BAD THINGS COME IN SMALL PACKAGES

CURSE OF THE DOLL PEOPLE (1961)

Starring Ramon Gay, Elvira Quintana and Roberto G. Rivera
Directed by Benito Alazraki
Written by Alfredo Salazar
BCI Eclipse



Curse of the Doll People: *An unapologetic, low budget knock-off of Tod Browning's* ***The Devil-Doll***

Mexican horror films of the 1960s are frequently a Frankenstein's monster of genre tropes, stitching elements of high-flying wrestling action, heart-tugging melodrama, mad science and occult fantasy onto a traditional gothic framework. A refreshingly straightforward chiller from Mexican schlock purveyors Cinematográfica Calderón S.A., *Muñecos infernales* (or *Curse of the Doll People* as it was later retitled for American audiences) proves you should always sweat the small stuff – especially if it's preparing to jam a foot-long needle into your neck.

One of the studio's best films of the decade, *Curse of the Doll People* is an unapologetic, cheap knock-off of Tod Browning's decent, but less-than-classic 1936 programmer *The Devil-Doll*, in which Lionel Barrymore enlists several miniaturized humans – created by a scientist intent on curbing world hunger – to murder his enemies. Stripping out all the distracting science and costly composite photography, *Curse of the Doll People* may be only a few steps away from poverty row, but it still manages to weave a surreal, dream-like atmosphere from its off-kilter camera angles and shadowy cinematography, making it far creepier than its inspiration.



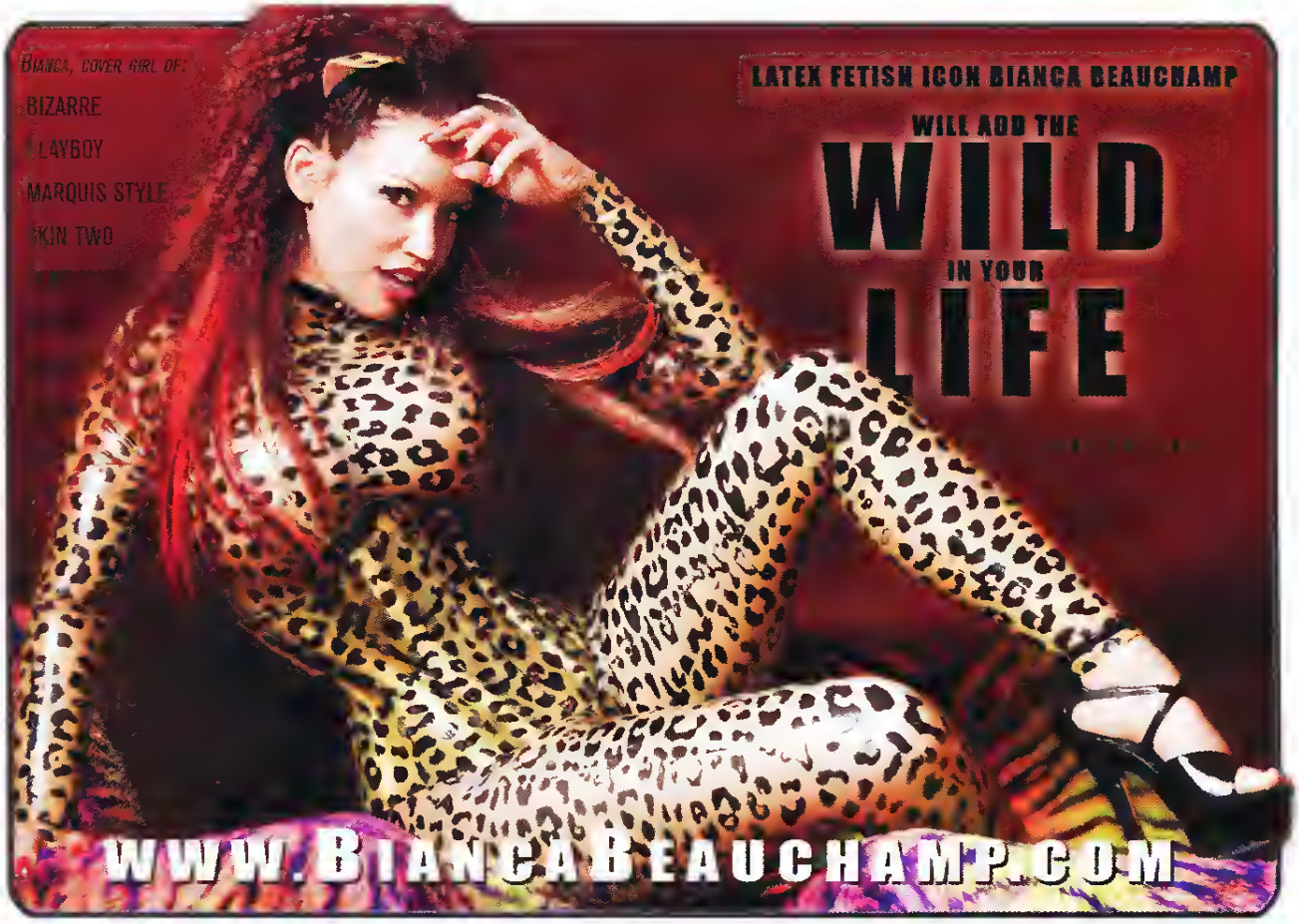
In the film, a team of archeologists return to Mexico City with a sacred idol recovered from an ancient temple. Laughing off rumours of a voodoo curse associated with the stolen artifact, they are suddenly besieged by strange and creepy occurrences orchestrated by a vengeful high priest (Quintín Bulnes). With the help of his zombie accomplice, the priest has the plunderers killed one by one, and traps their souls in three-foot-tall look-alike dolls. Brought to life, these dolls become diminutive killers willing to carry out the priest's evil plans. As their colleagues disappear, the remaining archeologists grab crucifixes and hunt down the priest to put a stop to the pint-sized murder spree.

Although never entirely free from camp, the film's unsettling "doll people" make it an unforgettably creepy experience. After a slow beginning crammed with expositional dialogue – a staple of the Mexican horror film – *Curse of the Doll People* lurches into its nightmare scenario, with a mute legion of dolls portrayed by what appears to be small children wearing tiny suits and papier-mâché masks. These headpieces may be crudely fashioned, but they exhibit a grotesque resemblance to the adult actors (including the addition of tiny goatees and eyeglasses) that makes them more than a little unsettling. Delivered to each victim's house in long, unmarked cardboard boxes by a flute-playing zombie assistant, these tiny killers strike down their targets with a long, deadly needle.

This visual is disturbing enough, but *Curse of the Doll People* also taps into one of the favourite subjects of the country's terror flicks: the tension between Mexico's rich pagan history and its desire to evolve into a Christian, industrial society. While in 1957's similarly themed Mexi-creature feature *The Aztec Mummy*, the titular monster proudly protected valuable Aztec treasures from the grasp of thieves and explorers, this time the archeologists are the only ones who can recover the idol and put an end to the priest's black magic. Interestingly enough, both films were scripted by the same man, Cinematográfica Calderón S.A. regular Alfredo Salazar, who appears to reconcile these seemingly contradictory subtexts with a strong, nationalistic message that historians and researchers must not lose sight of Mexico's unique history and identity as it moves into the future.

Presented in its shortened K. Gordon Murray English dub version, *Curse of the Doll People* joins other Murray imports *Spiritism*, *Night of the Bloody Apes*, *The New Invisible Man*, *Doctor of Doom* and *Wrestling Women vs. the Aztec Mummy* as part of *Crypt of Terror: Horror from South of the Border, Vol. 2*, a BCI Eclipse box set that offers a fun peek back at vintage Mexican trash.

Paul Corupe





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by John W. Bowen



All hail the ridiculous: absurdity's inbred, drunken, paint-huffing country cousin. During a conversation I had not long ago with prolific horror/sci-fi journalist John Kenneth Muir (*Horror Films of the 1980s*), he observed that, "To be a horror fan, you have to at some point be willing to embrace the ridiculous." Muir might easily have been referring to any horror film ever made, but as it happened, we were discussing *The Car*. "Because," he concluded, "if you can't embrace the ridiculousness of *The Car*, you can't enjoy it." Amen, Brother Muir.

It was for that very reason that many less sophisticated viewers (read: non-ridiculousness-embracing) couldn't enjoy *The Car* in 1977, and many still can't. A little bit *Jaws*, a little bit *Duel* and a whole lotta kick-ass, *The Car* has a small desert town terrorized by a mysterious automobile that appears from out of nowhere to run down its victims. Aside from the two patently obvious comparisons above, *The Car* is also heavily evocative of The Roadrunner's high-speed chases through dusty desert terrain, although said pursuits in this case generally turn out better for the predator than they do for the prey. Could this have been Wile E. Coyote's favourite film?

Many of the *The Car*'s detractors bemoan a lack of motivation, but to ask why this car has decided to target this particular small town is as moot as debating a certain shark's choice of Amity Island. Shit simply, inevitably, happens. In fact, that's why *The Car* works better than 99% of its post-*Jaws*, nature-run-amok contemporaries, since most of those films attempt some cockamamie rationalization, whereas a rogue driverless car is so completely divorced from the natural environment that it requires no back story whatsoever.

Besides, simple bad timing may also have played a role in the film's box-office failure, 1977 was the year of *Rabid*, *Suspiria* and *The Hills Have Eyes*, as well as the mega-budget bomb *Exorcist II: The Heretic*. In the midst of all this it's likely that *The Car* simply got lost in traffic.

As the film's aw-shucks hero, James Brolin is at his slightly grizzled best (if curiously shorn of his trademark chest hair) as a sheriff's deputy and single father, courting the local high school music teacher (Kathleen Lloyd), while Ronny Cox has an overwrought field day as a recovering alcoholic deputy who always seems to be minutes away from a *Scanners*-style head explosion, provided he doesn't fall off the wagon first. Instead of simply providing cannon fodder, other secondary characters actually flesh out the plot with Stephen King-style small-town back stories.

The Car was directed by the ultra-versatile Elliot Silverstein (*Cat Ballou*, *A Man Called Horse*) and boasts a terrific score by the recently deceased Leonard Rosenman (*Rebel Without a Cause* and – surprise – *Race With the Devil*), whose quoting of the 13th-century Latin hymn "Dies Irae" theme predates its more famous appearance in *The Shining* by three years and *Friday the 13th* by two.

The true star of *The Car* is, of course, the car itself, a gloriously fetishistic, black and silver heavy metal/art deco mash-up – my pick for the best album cover Judas Priest never had. Four cars were used in the production, each a heavily modified 1971 Lincoln Continental designed by LA's prolific George Barris (think *Batman*, *The Munsters*, *The Monkees*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*). Although ostensibly driverless, the machine is very much alive, characterized by P.O.V. shots of the action from behind its heavily tinted windshield.

Given that the automobile was the 20th century's second most recognizable signifier of male potency (after the gun), its possibilities as an object of menace would seem endless, although the only other films to seriously explore this theme have been *Duel*, John Carpenter's so-so adaptation of Stephen King's *Christine* (a "female" car!) and *Wheels of Terror*, a surprisingly solid 1990 made-for-cable thriller.

Most importantly, *The Car* makes for a terrific double bill with *Race With the Devil* – and Leonard Maltin hates it. It's being reissued by Anchor Bay this month, which is a good thing, and remade as we speak, which is probably a bad thing. Now, to borrow from Uncle Alice: if you don't want to wind up under my wheels, get the hell out of my basement.

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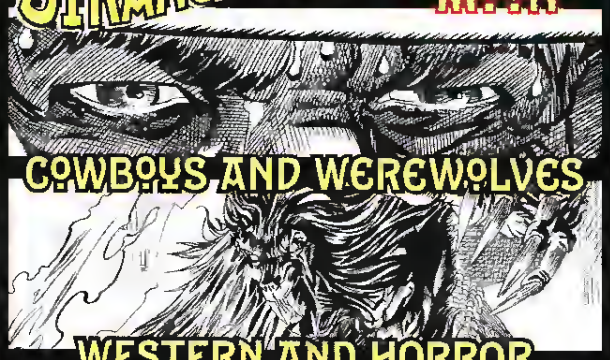
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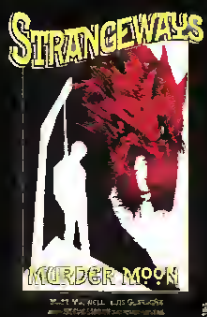
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HORROR

BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

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BY GARY BUTLER

IN THIS ISSUE!

JESSICA FARM VOL.1
Josh Simmona *Fantagraphics*

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HAUNTED
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"SPRING 2061" FROM ZOMBIE TALES #1
Kim Krizan and John Reed *BOOM!*

Despite its deceptively sedate title, Josh Simmons' previous graphic novel, *House* (*RM #70*), was *Rue Morgue*'s horror comic of 2007. It followed three youths breaking into an abandoned estate, discovering a secret passageway and meeting terrible fates. Dark, relentless and brilliantly claustrophobic, the book was a page-turner of the highest calibre. Simmons' new work, *Jessica Farm*, which overlapped with the creation of *House*, is its sister story.

Like *House*, this gripping story intentionally embraces the nightmare logic of a building that one cannot escape, but to which one must surrender. But while the engine driving this one is yet another spatial anomaly, *Jessica Farm* is peopled with bizarre creatures around every corner. Notable are a Klaus Kinski look-alike presiding over a kingdom of infant carcasses under a stairwell and, monstrous in name and disposition, the menacing and bellowing "Crangle-shitter" [pictured], whose agenda is not explained so much as avoided.

A serialized project, the 96-page Volume One of *Jessica Farm* ends in a tense situation that is less a cliffhanger than merely an abrupt break. If its architecture and characters seem to defy rational explanation, the book itself plays by one very concrete rule: Simmons is writing/drawing a single page per month, and has been doing so, quietly, for eight years. Which is to say, eight years thus far, as he plans to wrap the project in a total of fifty years, 2000-2050.

"Eight years, 96 months, 96 pages. That's the rule," confirms Simmons of the timeline for the first volume. "I thought of never telling anyone, at all, ever, then just letting people know in 2050, 'Hey, look at *this*!' Except I didn't think I could keep it quiet that long."

That pacing is perhaps why the first book ends in the middle of an awkward conversation with a giant bat-person. Maddeningly, Simmons is currently at about the 100-page mark of his 600-page odyssey, yet refuses to explain what's in store for the next part.

"When you talk about an idea too much, too early, you can inadvertently talk the interest right out of yourself," he says, adding that waiting eight years to announce his grand plan for *Jessica Farm* seemed like a reasonable enough amount of time to prove that he was "fully committed."

As it stands, we know little about the titular heroine except that her name is Jessica and she lives on a farm. The core of the nightmarish plot has her waking up on Christmas morning, exploring, meeting a dozen... things, and eventually being dispatched on a mission of grave importance by her grandparents. Evil is in the air and it seems that only Jessica can save the day. No surprise to hear that we don't know exactly what the mission is. Or the evil.



You'd better watch out – Jessica Farm is chased by the monstrous Crangle-shitter

A textbook journeywoman title character Jessica pulls the reader along on her shoulder every mysterious step of the way through her monster-ridden house. In fact, what lurks behind every door is often less important than the fact that every new confrontation assures that another will only come all the sooner. In that sense, *Jessica Farm* is like *Pan's Labyrinth* on acid – no small feat.

Simmons qualifies that the story will be adding to the mix elements of *Lord of the Rings* (with a smaller cast). In this writer's opinion, though, the first book leans more towards *Twin Peaks*. It's an interesting, heady mix, when you throw the two together.

So, *is* Jessica the farm? Is she exploring her own psyche?

"No," Simmons says, "but she's certainly exploring mine, in a very abstract sense."

He assures readers that he has predetermined the history of the farm and why/how it's a fantastical place. Expect a number of flashbacks, too, he warns – we've seen but one so far – and, as the first book seems to take place over a few hours, he is tempted to set the whole thing in a 24-hour period.

"A couple of years back, I thought about just finishing it, because I was really getting into it," he admits, "but I resisted, and I'm glad, because it's become a ritualistic, almost religious practice for me. It's always simmering in the back of my head. I can't promise what's coming, exactly, but I can promise I won't be on cruise control for the next 42 years."

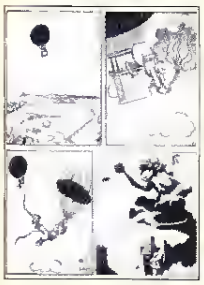
What if Simmons should pass away prematurely, though?

"The story would end early, I guess," he says. "It's not about the destination, it's about the journey."

QUICK CUTS

Reviews by Gary Butler, Eric Grant and Mark Moyes

Horror fans flipping through *Volume 4* of the non-horror *Comic Arf* anthology – featuring, as always, unusual and lesser-known strips from the past century – will be immediately drawn to Bob Powell's garish "Pit of the Damned," a gruesome pre-Comics Code tale of a carnival barker who outsources his house of horrors to Hell itself. A thorough excavation turns up a few more surprisingly creepy moments, including Walt (*Pogo*) Kelly's "Mary Quite Contrary," a whimsical excursion into a little girl's nightmare. But truly inspired are the 25 Milt Gross comic strips, which revisit 1920s work that the artist intentionally left uncompleted for other contemporaries to finish. For these, Arf commissioned all new strip endings from modern masters, such as Mike Mignola (pictured). Terrific fun. **EG**



Renowned for his introspective, semi-autobiographical comics, ultra-popular French cartoonist Philippe Dupuy makes a radical but sensible departure with *Haunted*. Also introspective, also semi-autobiographical, this one studies what's going on in the artist's dreams and nightmares (versus the day-to-day real-life matter of his previous efforts). Also markedly different are both the drawing and writing style, as all of Dupuy's previous works were co-created with Charles Berberian. Flying solo, Dupuy's art renderings have a scratchy and intentionally rushed look, a good approximation of dealing with a nightmare in the moment. This is philosophical horror at its subtlest – though the rat swallowing/vomiting sequence is masterful. **GB**



Please tell me that there's a market for a thoroughly postmodern *House of Mystery* revamp. Without doubt, this (re)launch issue is one of the best Vertigo debuts in years. Whether chief architect – well, writer – Matthew Sturges deserves the full credit here, is tough to say, but making the titular residence a variant of the Inn at World's End from *Sandman* is brilliant. It gives us a bigger story with a bigger mystery, as we learn in issue #1, the house itself disappeared, and even owner Cain cannot find it. But it also makes room for smaller stories, told by the people drinking at the bar (written by Bill Willingham this time 'round). On the art front, it's pretty functional until you hit Hungry Sally and see how perfectly Luca Rossi's design complements her sad story. Vote with your dollars, people and keep the *Mystery* alive. **GB**



Yes, those are Siamese twins, joined at the hip, until, one bloody scissor-snip later, they're neither. To call the unnerving, affecting *Lesions in the Brain* fragmented is punnily, precisely the point. Artist Dan Schaffer labels it "music for the deaf," and it looks like a music video, sonically excised. "I'm not going insane this time," repeats the narrator, but her lyrics lie, and the disconnect with the creepy, erotic photorealistic art is intentionally jarring (the twins are the likeness of writer/musician Katiejane Garside, who modelled naked for the experiment). Available both censored (in Image's upcoming *Popgun #2*) and uncensored, so consider reading it... twice. **MM**



In the age of decompression, sometimes less is more; alas, I can count on one hand the number of truly satisfying done-in-ones I've read of late. So hats off to the little guys at Angry Gnome for coming up with *Short Stack*, a collection of thirteen two-page horror stories illustrated by as many artists. Not just a great idea, it's a unique one. That said, the execution of both art and script leans towards the terribly amateur. The contributing pencillers are uniformly pedestrian, though there's an undeniable stylistic cuteness to "Perfect Love," and "Smoking Gun" and "Kid's Game" are all right. Still, the success of each story is left to across-the-board writer Shawn Gabborin. The key to horror when it's this short is making the twist ending count, which is accomplished only in "Valentine's at the Motel," "The First Step" and "Help!" Some advice: get a better cover artist, focus on interior nuts and bolts, but keep trying. It's a top-notch idea, so run with it. **GB**



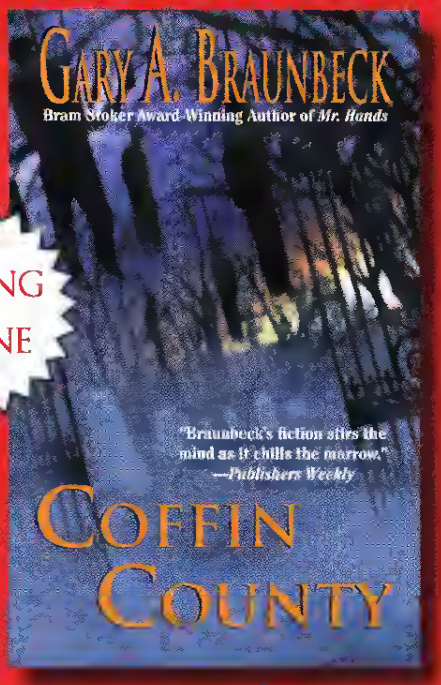
BOOM!'s new *Zombie Tales* ongoing anthology debuts this month, and allow me to draw your attention to a clever eight-page number with a throwaway title: "Spring 2061." In the distant-enough future, zombies are fully functional and intelligent. Humanity is around, but on the verge of extinction. Enter an undercover human, walking the diseased streets undetected because she's wearing a body suit of zombie skin. Watch her attend a fashion show, where zombies parade their own designs stitched together from freshly killed human body parts. Realize that George Romero gave us commentary on racism, consumerism and militarism, and now Kim Krizan has given us animal rights. Nice stuff, and ripe for a sequel. **GB**



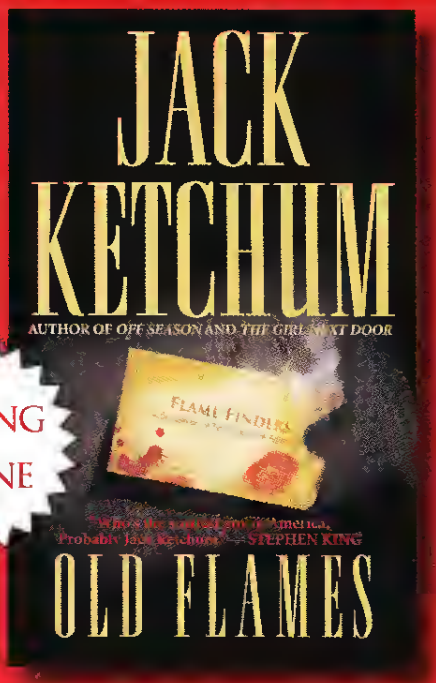




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Necronomicon: Book Five

Andy Black, ed.

Noir Publishing

Six years after the last entry in this series, writer/editor Andy Black finally weighs in with another collection of essays on horror cinema and television. The eleven efforts within – from seven different writers – range from the masterful to the pedantic, which is okay if you're used to taking the good with the bad, as one often must with such compilations.

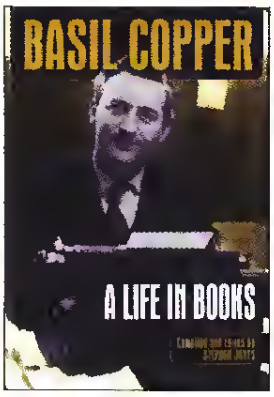
Far and away, the first entry ("The First Horror Soap" by Adrian Horrocks) is the best, presenting a smart critique of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s roots in both daytime and prime-time serial dramas. Of course, many hardcore *Buffy* fans (and even casual ones such as myself) have already read scores of critical essays about the hit show, written from numerous standpoints including religion, philosophy, folklore, sexuality and – most often – feminism. But Horrocks weighs in with an intriguing examination of *Buffy*'s winning hybrid of soap opera conventions (female-focused, dialogue heavy, with multiple and sometimes labyrinthine plot lines) melded with familiar horror tropes (violence, grotesque imagery, jarring shifts in action). The only catch is that this piece was obviously written at least six years ago, as in his conclusion the author refers to "recent episodes" and predicts that "the show may still have its best moments to come."

Black also turns in an impressive comparative analysis of two Neil Marshall films, the underrated *Dog Soldiers* and its overrated successor *The Descent*. Ironically, he ends the piece by musing that "it will be fascinating to see how Marshall fares with his next effort, *Doomsday*." One can scarcely imagine the poor man's devastation now.

Other efforts come up short, however. One essay on *The Thing From Another World* as a symptom of Red Menace hysteria, and another by Black examining underlying themes in the recent onslaught of zombie films are well written but offer nothing new. Black continues the downward trajectory with "Rural Gothic," a would-be critique of redneck horror that's devoted almost entirely to weak latter-day entries such as *Cabin Fever*, *House of 1000 Corpses* and *The Devil's Rejects*.

As typical with many small-press efforts, low production values and some very dodgy editing frequently mar the proceedings, and there are no writer bios either, which would have been helpful. Still, the better entries here (which fortunately still outnumber the lesser ones) make it worth the effort, not to mention the six-year wait.

John W. Bowen



Basil Copper: A Life in Books

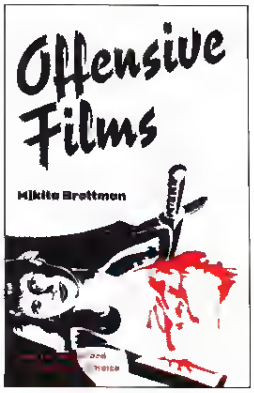
Stephen Jones, ed.

PS Publishing Ltd

Basil Copper has written more than 50 books ranging from mystery and horror to non-fiction, so it's not surprising to see his life and work be given the retrospective treatment in a new tome, compiled by Stephen Jones. Copper may have achieved wider success in his native United Kingdom than he has on this side of the Atlantic, but Jones' book serves as a perfect introduction for readers who may be unfamiliar with the author of such novels as *The Black Death* and *The Great White Space*.

With *A Life in Books* Jones has done a remarkable job of collecting a variety of Copper's work including short stories, essays and even a speech he delivered at Fantasycon 3 in 1977. Some of the pieces are new, while others date back as far as 1938. The selection of the work presented here exposes readers to Copper's ability to expertly dip his feet into the inky blackness of horror ("The Black Coffin"), his admiration for literary giants ("Remembering August Derleth and Arkham House") and his trademark mystery work ("Diamonds are for Never").

The slim book – it fills just under 280 pages – also provides some insight into the man himself, courtesy of Richard Dalby's



The Grim Reader

UNKLE PIGORS' CRYPTIC ART
Eric Pigors
Baby Tattoo Books



Rue Morgue's favourite twisted Unkle has returned with a creepy new retrospective art book absolutely dripping with blood-red ink and lime-green ooze. *Unkle Pigors' Cryptic Art* showcases hundreds of haunting illustrations, including his terrifying Toxic Toons, fantastically fearsome tattoo flash and absolutely abhorrent artwork for bands such as Metallica, Psycho Charger and the Murderdolls. A great gift for the groovie ghoulie in your life.

Last Chance Lance

H.P. LOVECRAFT IN BRITAIN
Stephen Jones
Smith & Jones



Editor Stephen Jones' monograph catalogues in detail the publication history of H.P. Lovecraft's fiction in Britain, based on materials (letters to August Derleth, contracts and other correspondences) discovered in two aging folders found at the Gollanzc publishing offices, many of which are reprinted here. An interesting curio with cover art by Les Edwards.

Jovanka Vuckovic

BLAZE
Richard Bachman
Scribner



Though it reads more like pulpy, crime fiction than outright horror, *Blaze* is the latest "posthumous" novel from Stephen King's alter-ego Richard Bachman. Sympathetically detailing the life of abuse and misery suffered by a feeble-minded criminal who is about to pull off the crime of the century with the help of his dead partner, this tearjerker is King, er Bachman, at his best.

Last Chance Lance



Basil Copper: A Life in Books: *The British author (right) with Christopher Lee*

essay on Copper's life and work, in which the prolific author is labelled one of "Britain's greatest masters of the macabre and Gothic fiction." It's one of the few entries that focuses as much on the man as his output, making it a nice lead-in to the fiction, essays, bibliographies and photographs which follow.

Sadly, though, *A Life in Books* is maimed by sloppy copy editing. The book provided to *Rue Morgue* said nothing about it being an uncorrected galley, which is unfortunate, as readers are likely to find themselves frustrated by the missing words and misspellings.

But, while this book on Copper may not be gold, there's still enough of a silver lining to make it a worthwhile read for both long-time fans and the uninitiated.

W. Brice McVicar

offensive films

Mikita Brottman
Vanderbilt University Press

If you've ever championed a horror movie that most people find indefensible, or tried to write a term paper on the hidden metaphors you found in *Child's Play*, you'll probably love this book.

Consisting of eight chapters that focus on seven revolting films (*Freaks*, *The Tingler*, *Blood Feast*, *Snuff*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Cannibal Holocaust*, *Irreversible*) and one subgenre (Mondo movies), *Offensive Films* dives face first into material that most serious academics wouldn't even deign to view, much less rigorously evaluate and study. That said, we should be thankful for Professor Brottman's efforts, because she has mined these movies to depths that would put many a hardcore horror fan to shame.

While allowing for the failings that some of the films possess, and the derision they rightfully engender, Brottman is still a tireless defender and supporter (she labels *Irreversible* a masterpiece, for example) of each and every title examined within. And though it's always great to see academics seriously tackling the subject of horror, it's even more thrilling when their subject matter happens to be films often considered to be lowbrow culture. It's equally impressive that Brottman's not afraid to take the History, Learning and Discovery Channels to task as an example of our society's double standards concerning graphic imagery.

Some readers may whine about the inclusion of incorrect release dates or the occasionally dry and overly long essay, but despite these minor irritants, each chapter houses many treasures. Of particular interest is Brottman's take on *Cannibal Holocaust*, her unbelievably profound and respectful examination of the film adds weight, meaning and significance to practically every frame.

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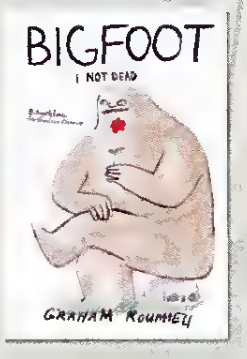
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AS GRAHAM ROUMIEU'S THIRD SASQUATCH MEMOIR PROVES, IT AIN'T EASY BEING BIGFOOT, BUT SOMETIMES IT'S PRETTY HILARIOUS.

"Seriously, I NOT Chewbacca"

BY PAUL CORUPE

"Everyone want piece of my pie," grumbles Bigfoot, star of a series of laugh-out-loud "autobiographies" by Toronto-based commercial illustrator Graham Roumieu. Roumieu's latest book, *Bigfoot. I Not Dead,* picks up where 2003's *In Me Own Words: The Autobiography of Bigfoot* and 2005's *Me Write Book: It Bigfoot Memoir* left off, demystifying the cryptozoological curiosity through primitive prose and loose pen-and-watercolour drawings. Whether having to apologize for deadly benders after drinking too much peach schnapps, dealing with the shame of hair loss or lamenting his resemblance to that no-talent jerk Chewbacca, the hirsute favourite has evolved from the stuff of nightmares into a self-obsessed hominid plagued by a few bad dreams of his own – though he still wouldn't hesitate to smash in your skull with the nearest boulder.



"It all began as a school project to do an illustration based on the Harper's Index, which is a list of offbeat, humorous statistics in *Harper's Magazine*," explains Roumieu. "One of the entries said 26 or 27 women each year in the United States claim to be impregnated by Bigfoot." Accompanied by Bigfoot's comments – "illegitimate" and "you no can prove" – this amusing but baffling scenario later appeared as a two-page spread in *Me Write Book*. In it, several women walk hand-in-hand with goofy half-sasquatch children, including one that gleefully shows off the bloody head of a victim to his disapproving human mother.

This irreverent take on the character has made Roumieu's work a success. The first volume, picked up by Manic D Press, a small publisher based in San Francisco, is meant to feel like Bigfoot's handmade diary, with crudely spelled entries, photos and even occasional splashes of blood on the page. Plume, an imprint owned by Penguin, released Roumieu's second book, in which the character is used to satirize dating, self-help books and celebrity.

"To me, the second one was more Bigfoot's best attempt at making a glossy coffee-table book like Madonna's *Sex*," he says, "only put together with a glue stick, sparklers and pipe cleaners."

The latest installment, *Bigfoot. I Not Dead*, finds the famous sasquatch releasing a line of shoddy fan club merchandise, revealing the secret habits of his fellow forest creatures and even taunting the *National Enquirer* in his last will and testament.

"This one is not so much a memoir as a book of advice. I composed the book in a way that every few pages Bigfoot seems like he's getting his life back on track and making a valid point, but then everything starts falling apart again," Roumieu explains. "Visually it goes back to the first book – it's a little simpler, and maybe a little more vulgar and violent, which I was very happy to do."

Although better known for his illustration work in publications such as *New York Times* magazine and *The Progressive* than his writing, Roumieu has little trouble penning Bigfoot's broken English musings.

"It's so easy to write as Bigfoot, I just hold my pen like a knife and imagine my brain shrunken down to the size of an apricot, rattling back and forth in my head like a marble in a can of spray paint," he jokes. "What's so great about this character is that I can never feel bad putting him in tragic situations because he is such a horror in these books – he kills almost everybody he comes in contact with."

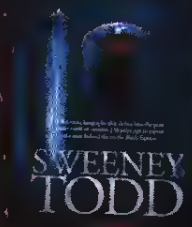
Despite their violent overtones, Roumieu's Bigfoot books have received an overwhelmingly positive response, including a Hollywood option to bring the big guy's memoirs to the silver screen. Still, in addition to parents, who have somehow mistaken the profanity-laden books as appropriate for children, at least one online reviewer, a dedicated sasquatch researcher, complained he didn't glean any useful information at all from the books. Pointing to his illustration of a wild Hollywood pool party in which Bigfoot chugs from a liquor bottle while a bikini-clad woman rides his shoulders firing off an Uzi, the author shakes his head in disbelief. "It's all cool, I dig what the reviewer's doing, but Jesus, did you even preview the book?!"

While *Bigfoot: I Not Dead* may not offer conclusive evidence that Bigfoot really exists, these strange reactions to Roumieu's irreverent humour prove that no matter how popular Bigfoot gets, he will remain a fundamentally misunderstood monster.



sweeney todd: the real story of the demon barber of fleet street

Peter Haining
Robson Books



"Attend the tale of Sweeney Todd. His skin was pale and his eye was odd. He shaved the faces of gentlemen who never, thereafter, were heard from again." Did he really? The urban legend of the Demon Barber of London circulated for centuries before this lyric by Stephen Sondheim turned him into a Broadway star, tantalizing audiences with his cut-throat tale of murder and meat pies. For sure, Todd is as infamous a Victorian serial killer as Jack the Ripper. But did he really and truly exist? Peter Haining believes so. The author's detailed investigation (originally published back in 1993 and recently updated to take advantage of the hoopla surrounding Tim Burton's film) aims to separate fact from fiction.

Trouble is, there ain't much fact to go on, and what can be proven is contradictory. Olde English records do prove the existence of one Mr. Sweeney Todd, who became a barber on Fleet Street after a youth of petty crime. And he really did get accused of slicing his customers' throats. But according to Haining's own findings, Todd was convicted on circumstantial evidence – no bodies were found and the alleged accomplice Mrs. Lovett hanged herself before the trial. The whole sordid tale might very well have been no more than neighbourhood gossip. After all, the barber-as-boogeyman predates him: Haining uncovers a French folk ballad from the 15th century detailing a barber who polishes off his clientele while his female accomplice turns them to pork pies. So which is it? Art imitating life, or the reverse?

Considering his passion, Haining's writing style is disappointingly dull – an entertaining detective mystery turned dry treatise. The book does, by accident, offer a fascinating look at 19th-century London, detailing the harsh inner city life, the court system, the emergence of lurid Penny Dreadfuls and the early days of theatre. It also traces Todd from his first fictionalized account (the romance serial "A String of Pearls") up to today. But no matter how much Haining wants the crime to be true, his work just doesn't make it so.

Liisa Ladouceur

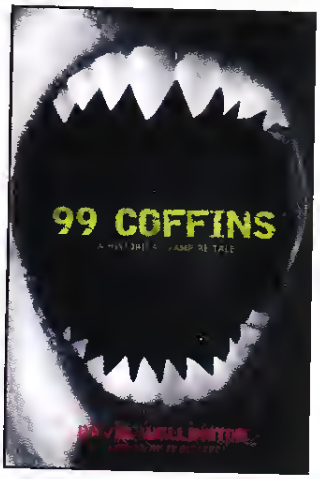
By linking subjects as far-reaching as the Italian futurists and Tibetan tulpas and wendigos (to name but a few) to some of the most disturbing films ever made, Brottman has come up with a classic that belongs on every horror cinephile's bookshelf.

Michael Mitchell

99 coffins

David Wellington
Three Rivers Press

David Wellington wrote my favourite vampire novel of this decade (2006's *13 Bullets*), so, naturally, I was all over this sequel like Dracula on a pretty lady's neck, even though it's billed as a "historical" tale – not my favourite subgenre. They may be wearing Civil War threads but Wellington's vamps fit right in with the contemporary school of thought on the creatures of the night: light on supernatural powers, heavy on hunger. As Steve Niles did with *30 Days of Night*, Wellington reclaims the monsters from their emasculation in the kind of lame chick-lit romances that dominate the Amazon bestseller lists. And once again he succeeds in conjuring savage beasts who spray the pages of his story with blood.



Being a sequel, the novel sees the return of *13 Bullets* star Laura Caxton, a Highway Patrol trooper turned vampire bunter, and her mentor, the legendary creature killer Jameson Arkeley. Arkeley is a well-worn archetype: the old curmudgeon. Laura, on the other hand, is a refreshingly nuanced heroine whose gender and sexuality (she's a lesbian) are never made a bigger deal than her actions. (It's cool to see a woman kick ass without turning into Barb Wire.) For newcomers, Laura and Arkeley's background is swiftly dealt with, then it's on to a new mystery: the titular 99 coffins ,which have been found buried deep underground at Gettysburg by an archeological dig. Remnants of one smashed pine box lead Arkeley to believe a new vamp is running amok in their midst. Soon, he and Laura are unravelling a plot to resurrect not-so-dead soldiers and preparing for a vicious showdown with a legion of undead that will once more soak the battlefields with blood.

As with *13 Bullets*, Wellington has augmented the bloodsucker myth with new motivations, powers and weaknesses. The back story is told through historical documents, which bring a more literary flavour to the often pulpy tale. In these dusty letters, torched vampires "curl like a moth that has touched flame," their voices like "a violin had been scraped with the neck of a broken bottle." Together, the styles make *99 Coffins* a poetic page-turner you can finish in a weekend. And like all of Wellington's work, it's also available for free as an online serial at davidwellington.net.

Liisa Ladouceur



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SALES FROM THE CRYPT













WARNING!

TRAVELOGUE OF TERROR

Fort George
Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario
by Brad Abraham



If there is a Ground Zero for the ghostly denizens of Niagara, it is Fort George. Long before this tourist attraction was a historical site, it was home to enlisted men, officers and their families, many of whom were killed here when the Fort became a pivotal battleground during the bloody War of 1812.

Life in that period was often brutal and short. The Fort was shattered by American artillery fire and captured during the Battle of Fort George in May 1813, and American forces used it as a base to invade the rest of Upper Canada. They were eventually repelled at York (now Toronto) and forced back across the border. However, before retreating, the occupiers put the entire town of Niagara to the torch. Whole families were wiped out by flame or by the cold, after getting cast out into the snow as homes were reduced to ash and cinder.

To this day, Niagara-on-the-Lake boasts more ghosts per capita than anywhere else in Canada, and as tour organizers The Friends of Fort George set out to prove, the spooks of Fort George do not rest easy. Since its inception in 1996, the tour has become one of the most famous haunted attractions in Canada.



At dusk, our tour group assembles at the Fort, now an intricately restored historical site at the mouth of the Niagara River. Surrounded by massive wooden walls, guarded by a heavy gate and cannons and patrolled by sentries in period dress, it's both authentic and foreboding. As the sun dips below the battlements and a chill settles in, we're approached by a robed figure carrying a lantern – our guide. He leads the procession through the grounds while painting a portrait of the Fort and surrounding area during its heyday.

After passing through the gates and crossing the parade grounds, we enter the barracks. It's a large room where the soldiers and their families lived, here visitors supposedly hear disembodied footsteps and other strange noises. Unexplainable lights and shapes have been glimpsed peering out of windows; this is where most people claim to have encounters with ghosts.

One of those ghosts is Sarah Anne. After finishing this portion of the tour some years ago, a woman asked the guide about "the little girl in period dress" watching and listening from stairs leading to the closed upper level. The assumption was that the girl was a daughter of one of the guides, there to add authenticity to the proceedings. But there was no girl, at least not a living one. Repeated sightings of this "little girl with ringlet hair" led organizers to do some research, and they now believe she was named Sarah Anne and she lived at the Fort decades after the War of 1812. Some claim to have seen her following the ghost tours, giving credence to a theory that the tour's very presence has awakened something in the Fort's grounds.

For years staff members have said that there is something "not right" with the barracks, many reporting encounters with dark shadows and shapes lurking in the corners, or hearing heavy footsteps in the closed storage space above. But as the guide takes his lantern outside, darkening the barracks, the only heavy footsteps we hear are the quick ones to the exit.

Outside, night has fallen and only the swaying candle lights the way. The group moves carefully down a steep path to the northeast corner of the Fort, where the most unsettling stop on the tour awaits. This is the tunnel.

The twenty metre-long subterranean passage leads to the magazine, a cavernous chamber with a circular staircase leading to an above-ground lookout post. Upon entering it, a wave of claustrophobia hits us and several visitors flat out refuse to continue forward, preferring to wait outside for the tour to resume. Initially there were no stories attached to the tunnel, but then the sightings began. The first was from a woman who claimed to be enveloped by an inky darkness that was swirling around two spectral figures with dead eyes – an event that happened in broad daylight. Other daytime visitors said they encountered a man dressed in a soldier's period uniform, who they took to be a member of the staff, only to later learn that no staff were present that day dressed in costume. During one ghost tour, a teenage loudmouth dismissed the spectral goings-on until he entered the tunnel, was grabbed by a cold, spectral hand and fled screaming. Of all the ghostly photos snapped at the Fort, most of the photographic evidence of spectres comes from this passage. We become very aware that there's only one way in or out.

Gladly free of the tunnel, we visit the officers' quarters, located in the middle of the parade grounds, also, of course, said to harbour frequent "poltergeist activity." Apparently, sounds of music and singing are often heard at night after

the Fort is closed and only a few security guards patrol the area. The drawing room, in particular, contains one of the settlement's most chilling features: what has said to be mistaken for a "painting of a beautiful woman" is actually a mirror reflecting a frequently appearing female spirit. It's also claimed that sometimes a glow will appear in the windows of the room, as if a fire is roaring on the hearth, and one time an odd greenish glow was observed surrounding the building. When staff investigated, they were shocked to find furniture moving on its own. The furnishings in the officers' quarters have been left as the ghosts seem to prefer it, and at night staff members refuse to enter the quarters at all.

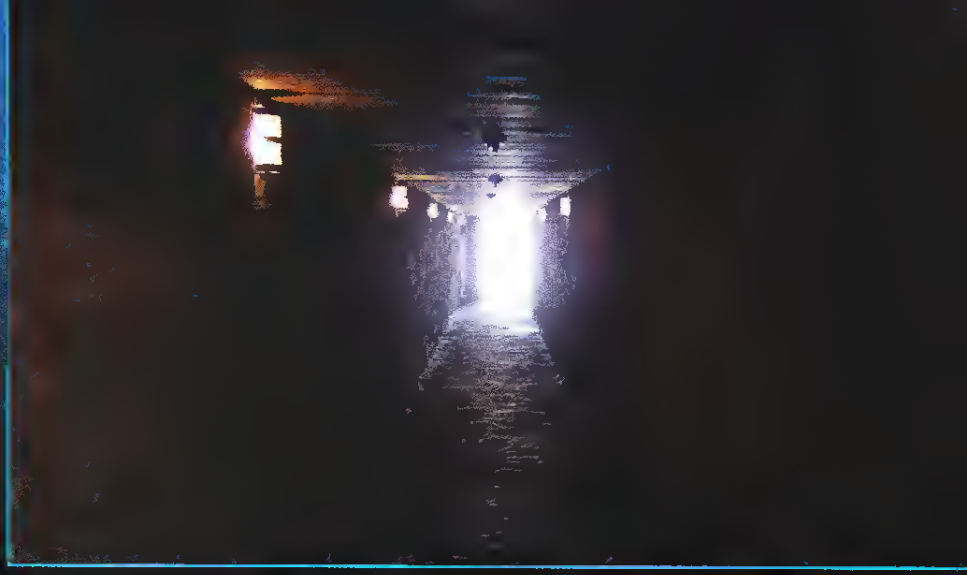
We're told that the supposedly reassuring battlements ringing the Fort have seen spectral visitations, as well; recently, a soldier's torso has been seen patrolling them. In addition, at other parts of the walls people have seen cannons which no longer exist, and crews of soldiers manning them. Spectral sentries are still seen on occasion guarding the Fort's entrance, as well. Their intent is unclear; possibly to keep unwanted visitors out, or to prevent others from leaving. Even police officers called to the Fort to roust trespassers reportedly have fled, pale and trembling, at the sight of spectres.

All of the volunteer guides claim to have supernatural experiences of their own to share. As the tour comes to an end, the guide shows the group a photo he took of what looks to be a human figure standing in the officers' quarter's main room.

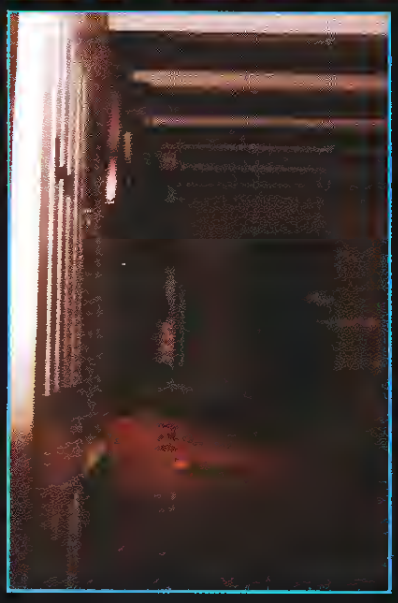
Having heard so much talk of the strange and inexplicable, we're disappointed that we didn't see something a little more mysterious. That is until a dim light drifts past the Fort's entrance. Surely it's just another tour guide entering – except our group was the last of the evening....

Fort George is located on the Niagara Parkway, Niagara-on-the-Lake. The Ghost Tours at Fort George last from 1.5 to 2 hours and take place in the evening, from May to September, with additional tours offered in the weeks leading up to Halloween. Admission is free; the ghost tours are $10 per adult, $5 for children under twelve.

For more info go to friendsoffortgeorge.ca/ghost.htm.









Fort George: *(clockwise from top) The twenty-metre-long subterranean passage that leads to the magazine, the officers' quarters, two views of the officers' rooms, and (opposite) Kyle Upton, Fort George tour guide.*







THE GORE-MET MENU

Herr Gore-met tunnels into the German underground for two new Unearthed releases.


Das Komabrutale Duell

Thousands of beer-soaked video nights ago, I stumbled onto the German underground shot-on-video splatter scene through a rental of Olaf Ittenbach's *The Burning Moon*. Or was it Andreas Schnaas' *Zombie 90: Extreme Pestilence*? Okay, so I'm a little foggy here. Regardless, I was immediately smitten by the copious cheapjack gore these awful amateur atrocities delivered.

I tracked down what I could on VHS, but North American distribution of these gooey curios has always been spotty. On DVD, Shock-O-Rama's releases of Ittenbach's *Premutos* and Schnaas' *Zombie Doom*, a.k.a. *Violent Shit 3* (which includes *Zombie 90* as a supplement) are about it, making Unearthed's new discs a most welcome addition to this artistically dubious subgenre.

DAS KOMABRUTALE DUELL (1999)

Starring Heiko Fipper, Mike Hoffman and Stefan Hoft
Written and directed by Heiko Fipper

The plot here, as much as can be gleaned from the screen, concerns a gang war that erupts after a fatal hatchet accident. Ten years later, the sole survivor is released from hospital and the absurdly violent retribution resumes.



For the benefit of our European readers, here is my one-word review auf Deutsch: *unzusammenhangend*! That's German for incoherent, which translates better than "What a fucking mess!" But first, the gore, which is the only reason to watch this monstrosity. The director's love for Peter Jackson's *Dead Alive* is painfully apparent as the cast is constantly showered in brackish brown blood. This well-used schtick – cast members clutching a garden hose taped to their chests while geysers of yuck spray everywhere – gets old quickly.

Worse, the characters are indistinguishable because the actors are related and resemble each other, or are unrecognizable because of thick latex makeup, or appear in consecutive scenes that are too similar and serve no narrative purpose. The film is at least 30 minutes too long and plagued by ceaseless fist/gunfights.

Fortunately, there are enough guffaw-inducing no-budget practical makeup effects sprinkled throughout and a sword-through-skull gag that'll definitely put a little bounce in the ol' gore-nads.

For the hardcores, there are also two tasteless flashbacks in which pregnant women are brutally violated. One has her womb slit open so a pair of fetuses can be ripped out and smooshed into the pavement, while the other has her vagina stomped by two men who pluck out a baby and chuck it into the bushes!

Yep, messy…

HUNTING CREATURES (2004)

Starring Boris Hansmann, Oliver Kellisch and Andreas Pape
Written and directed by Oliver Kellisch and Andreas Pape

Now we're talking. A quartet of badass Teutonic thugs organizes a rave in an abandoned factory, where a partygoer fiddles with the controls of a boiler and unleashes a gas into the ventilation system that turns the ravers into flesh-eating zombies. Three-quarters of the gang escape and team up with a scientist to wipe out the growing horde of undead.

Hunting Creatures is a far more accomplished film – relatively lean, featuring higher production values, inventive cinematography and superior, albeit standard (read brain-splattering headshots, torn-out intestines and gnawed-on detached limbs) zombie gore effects. The soundtrack, a mixture of ambient, techno and power and death metal, mostly works too.



The payoff, though, is the last half hour of the film, a satisfying platter of splatter that includes a righteously bloody slaughterhouse melee between the gang and a gaggle of assorted zombies. The final shot, utilizing but one actor, is an ingenious and wonderfully effective evocation of the apocalypse.

Both films are in the original German, with optional English subtitles. *Hunting Creatures* has the classier visual presentation, being in non-anamorphic matted widescreen. Extras include behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted scenes and trailers for these titles and other Unearthed releases. Regular readers of this space and other blithering idiots are advised to check these bad boys out and revel in a couple of Germanic gorefests that spew more meat than an explosion at the bratwurst factory.


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WINNER
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FANTASTIC FEST

"One fucked-up number."
Ain't It Cool News



It's not love if there's no suffering.
Everybody knows that.

RUE MORGUE CINEMA
PRESENTS

THE DEMONOLOGY OF DESIRE

a film by rodrigo gudiño

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AUDIO DROME

REVIEWS BY KEITH CARMAN, TOMB DRAGOMIR, MARK R. HASAN, LIISA LADOUCEUR, AARON VON LUPTON, SEAN PLUMMER AND TREVOR TUMINSKI



HAUNTING VILLISCA Soundtrack
David James Nielsen
MovieScore Media

Sometimes the most effective way to tell a horror tale involving axe murders is through subtle contrasts, as newcomer David James Nielsen does in this gorgeously performed orchestral score. Recorded in Prague, Nielsen's initial cues nevertheless evoke the serene Iowa locale where the true-life killings occurred, and cuts such as "The Pretty Place" convey the idyllic farmland through use of harp and woodwinds, locked to a slow, breezy tempo. Opting for a very restrained scoring style (Richard Einhorn's melodic *Sister Sister* comes to mind), Nielsen is sparing in his use of symphonic might, emphasizing colour, melody and gentle shifts in mood to illustrate encounters with murderous elements without slamming the listener with a full orchestra. Elegantly constructed with a mere handful of shock cues (many fairly brief), this downloadable album leaves one with a sense of tragedy instead of the usual adrenaline rush. **MRH** ☠☠☠☠



JAWS 3-D Soundtrack
Alan Parker
Intrada Special Collection Vol. 54

After cluttering LP and tape bins back in the day, the *Jaws 3-D* score is now one of the most sought-after scores in the franchise. In the film's mix, and on the LP, Alan Parker's score benefited from some fine engineering, and Intrada's limited edition CD offers a crisp transfer from the bass-friendly album master (albeit with no new cues, which is a major downer). The release is a bit echoey, but appropriately expansive for the film's 3-D projection. The exciting herald that underscores the waterskiing bunnies after the main credits is a major highlight, and its downscaled version fits seamlessly with clever variations of Williams' dah-dum theme without a forced direct quote. The weakest thematic material comes from "Underwater Kingdom" where Parker establishes his own three-note motif. It's sappy and idiosyncratic, but it works as potent and memorable angry shark music. **MRH** ☠☠☠



POLKADOT CADAVER Expermental
Purgatory Dance Party
Rotten Records

Some bands just try harder than others to stick out in a crowd. Polkadot Cadaver, formed from the scattered remains of Baltimore's Dog Fashion Disco, boasts a schizophrenic sound that features strange baroque breakdowns, circus music, pianos and folk instruments smashing out little bits of jazz-fusion, metal, disco and evil industrial operatics. And while it sounds like I'm just throwing around a lot of crazy words here, that's pretty much exactly how *Purgatory Dance Party* plays musically – kind of like a bizarre but traditional rock band's interpretation of a Jackson Pollock painting. Fantomas-esque digital fuckery and a weirdly touching Ween-meets-Syd Barrett ballad ("Haunted Holiday") aside, *PDP*'s a tough listen with just a few treasures buried beneath its thorns. **TD** ☠☠1/2



FUNERAL CRASHERS Goth
La Fin Absolue du Monde
Independent

Inspired by Cronenberg, Lynch, Poe and Lovecraft (the singer even calls himself "P.H. Lovecraft"), the Funeral Crashers introduce themselves as "dark rock for the art damaged and fashionably dead" – a rougher version of NYC brethren Interpol, with less moping in the shadows and more sleazy, back alley ambience. The band's post-punk/goth rock Jesus and Mary Chain aesthetic sounds best when Lovecraft's monotone chant is "dragged out on the Devil's teeth" on "Blackout Days" or sliding through the keyhole during the voyeuristic, suggested violence of "Video Killer." Ironically, their cocksure slinkiness almost runs right off the rails on "Safe" but that's part of what makes their nightcap of warm synth, cagey guitar, billowy bass and hypnotic toms so enticing. It's an unpredictable, potentially combustible sound rarely heard in today's sea of overly polished radio turds. Tailor-made for a dark, dingy booze can, the Funeral Crashers' debut is a cheeky, artful kiss-off to the end of the world. **TT** ☠☠☠1/2



THE FORBIDDEN 5 Rock
Chop You Up!
ISU Records

Mangy, bass-heavy garage à la Sonics and The Cramps, Pittsburgh's Forbidden 5 bring a little rockabilly swing to classic barroom blues on rough tunes about mental illness, necrophilia and freshly carved flesh. But that's not all, there are also nods to flicks such as *Night of the Bloody Apes* and Mario Bava's *Kill Baby Kill*.

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NIHE INCH NAILS Electronic
Ghosts I-IV
The Null Corporation / F.A.B.



Trent Reznor is a free man. And for his first independent release, he has exorcized 36 "ghosts" – short instrumental tracks of varying degrees of creepiness, from shiver-me-timbers to what-the-fuck-was-that? A study in stark, minimal rhythms and ambient atmospherics (interrupted occasionally by glitchy shards of club-tracks-in-waiting), the untitled songs are more like audio paintings, your own private NIN gallery installation. As with any album of this length, there's bound to be filler, but snip a few tracks and find yourself immersed in a faux scary movie soundtrack reminiscent of *The Fragile*'s instrumentals or ex-NIN Charlie Clouser's *Saw* scores. As anyone with an ISP has already heard: this was first available on nin.com as a free download, complete with full artwork and the option to pay for various physical formats. A revolutionary idea that netted Reznor $1.6 million in sales in the first week. Gives a new spin to that olde expression "freedom isn't free." **LL** ☠☠☠☠

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BAUHAUS — Goth

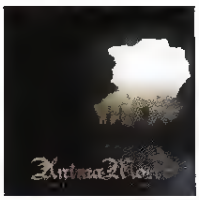
Go Away White

BAUHAUS MUSIC



Undead undead undead indeed. *Go Away White* is Bauhaus' first studio album since 1983's *Burning From the Inside*, and its bold mixture of melody and chaos is a fitting epitaph to a career that virtually spawned "goth." Peter Murphy (vocals), Daniel Ash (guitar, saxophone), David J (bass) and Kevin Haskins (drums) resurrect the spirit of their early work while never once sounding retro. Indeed, the magnificent gloom of Bauhaus classics like "Bela Lugosi's Dead" and "She's In Parties" has been buried in favour of vibrant glam rock stomps ("International Bulletproof Talent," "Too Much 21st Century") and melodic alt-rock ("Adrenalin"). The band's ability to match hooks with dark experimentalism remains intact, though, especially on "Endless Summer of the Damned" and the epic "The Dog's a Vapour." If *Go Away White* is truly the final nail in Bauhaus' coffin then let a smile light up that pallid complexion because it's a stunner. **SP** ☠☠☠☠

If you're into The Stooges, you'll dig singer Bruce Lentz's Iggy-like snarl on "Slice and Dice." "Not of This Earth" has a flange-y Blue Oyster Cult feel and "Fang Boner" is hands down one of the catchier instru*mental* surf songs we've come across. Goes well with beer. **TD** ☠☠☠



ANIMA MORTE — Prog Rock

Face the Sea of Darkness

DEAD BEAT MEDIA

Swedish prog rock meets Italian gore cinema on Anima Morte's *Face the Sea of Darkness*, one of the first releases from Dead Beat Media, the same people behind quality horror death metal label Razorback Records. The touchstones here are obvious, as Goblin and Fabio Frizzi meet in atmospheric, keyboard-drenched numbers that are a little bit *Suspiria*, and a little more *City of the Living Dead*. It's important to note, however, that while the band draws influence from those gore scores, Anima Morte's music does not strive to imitate soundtrack material, à la Enoch Complex, jazzy and occasionally bright and funky, *Face the Sea of Darkness* could easily sit next to someone's Emerson, Lake and Palmer CDs, and not just in the home of a hardened horror fan. Fear not, there's plenty of dark and sinister material here, particularly in the album's final two numbers "Twilight of the Dead" and "Funeral March." Quite frankly, there aren't enough horror bands out there making this kind of forward-thinking music. **AVL** ☠☠☠☠



BRAIN DRILL — Metal

Apocalyptic Feasting

METAL BLADE

Uniting the neurotic musical cacophony of Dillinger Escape Plan with Six Feet Under's brutal low-end, guttural vocal delivery – not to mention outright disgusting lyrics – tertiary Brain Drill effort *Apocalyptic Feasting* is nothing short of a jarring shock to the system. Odd time changes dissolve into sporadic blast beats before shifting again into straightforward, detuned chugging on tracks such as "Consumed by the Dead" and "Bury the Living." Packed with the most morbid of intentions, *Apocalyptic Feasting* is a bloody banquet. As disturbing as it is complex, Brain Drill's latest showcases an unending wealth of technical proficiency and gore. **KC** ☠☠☠☠



HELGRIND — Metal

Fallen Prophet

CASKET

It's reassuring to know that in case the first Slayer breaks, we have a back-up. A precursor EP to Helgrind's forthcoming *Religious Persecution* album, the four songs that make up *Fallen Prophet* revel in thrash metal's late-'80s heyday. We're talking straight-up *South of Heaven* – each tune features the trademark wailing/finger-tapped solos, throaty vocal delivery and satanic/borderline grotesque imagery of the aforementioned album by the Masters of Evil. Even the scissor-kick beats that ensure each song maximizes a double-time feel are a case for "the sincerest form of flattery." Yet, it's hard to give Helgrind shit when songs such as "Face of Evil" and "One Solution" have more gritty drive and spirited originality than the band from which they are paraphrased. **KC** ☠☠☠



SINAMORE — Metal

Seven Sins a Second

NAPALM RECORDS

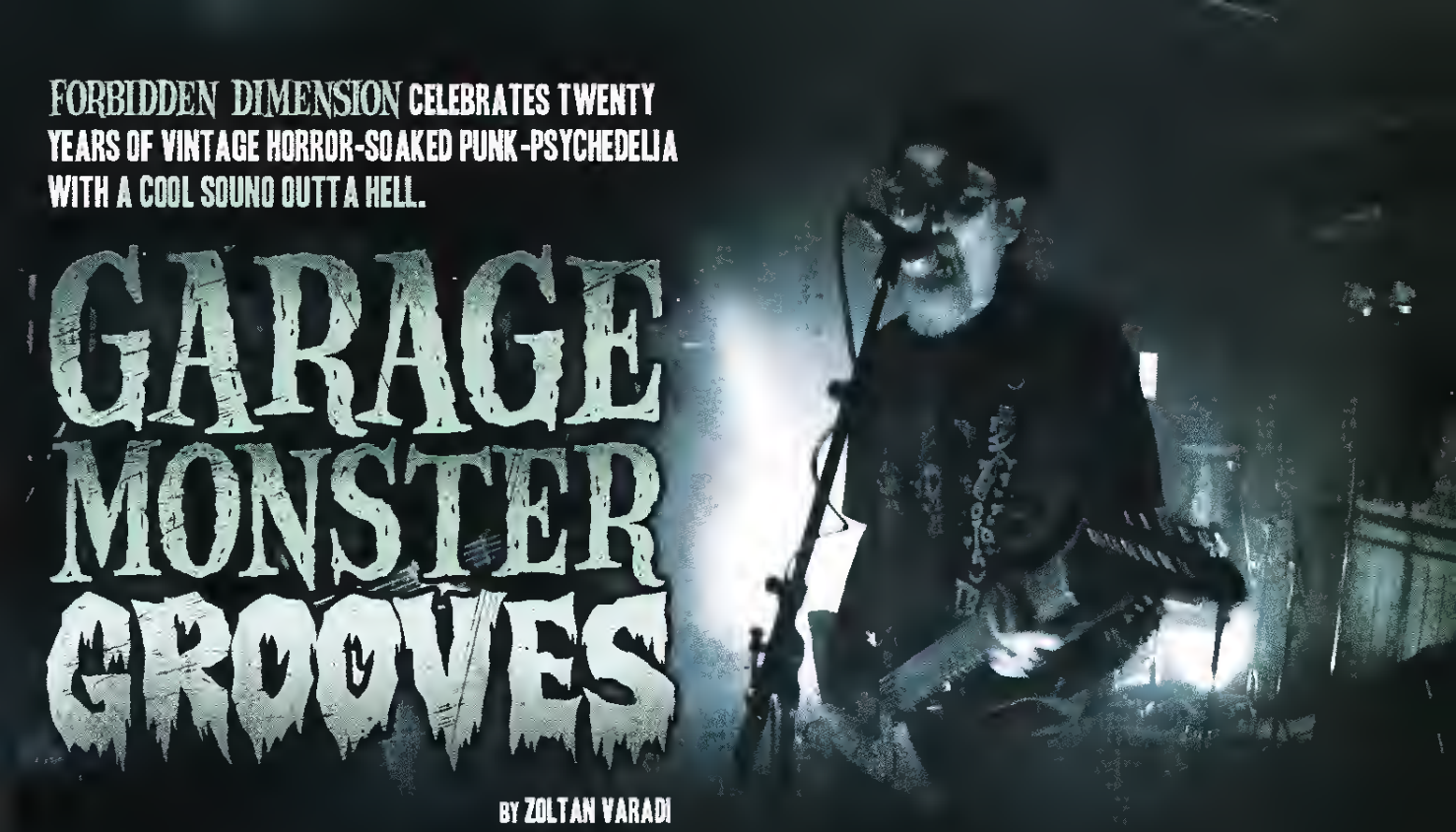
Finnish goth metal rockers Sinamore return with a second dose of, well, pretty standard stuff, actually. Quiet, sorrowful verses are set against power-chorded choruses replete with lyrics best summed up as a promise that you and I *will* be together in this life or the next even if, for now, we can only love from within the shadow of our own two damaged black hearts in eternal embrace. In their coolest moments ("Better Alone" and "Unbreakable Calm") the band cops the same kind of ground-in-the-dirt groove as Killing Joke, with wisps of early Metallica-era James Hetfield on vocals. In addition, during the verses of "Frozen Mile" and "Eyes of May," ethereal passages of beautiful melancholy seem ripped right out of the Depeche Mode handbook. But in their moments of weakness, which unfortunately trump the good shit, Sinamore treads precariously close to Evanescence-with-testicles territory. **TT** ☠☠





FORBIDDEN DIMENSION CELEBRATES TWENTY YEARS OF VINTAGE HORROR-SOAKED PUNK-PSYCHEDELIA WITH A COOL SOUND OUTTA HELL.

GARAGE MONSTER GROOVES



BY ZOLTAN VARADI

The album title references an obscure 1959 low-budget film about beatniks, while the music – metallic garage augmented by spooky analogue organs – speaks of lycanthropy, Stanley Kubrick ("Hatchet Fight in a Mannequin Factory," à la his film *The Killer's Kiss*), Vincent Price and the troubles of a small-town, adolescent cyclops. For Calgary, Alberta's Forbidden Dimension, it's horror business as usual on their latest full-length epic, *A Cool Sound Outta Hell*.



If this particular realm of the musical outer limits has escaped your attention, you're forgiven. This band (celebrating its 20th anniversary this year) hasn't exactly made it easy on audiences to tune in. They've only toured once – just eight dates across Canada some fifteen years ago – and the bulk of their best work, three albums on Montreal's defunct Cargo Records, is out of print and exceedingly hard to come by. And then there's the music itself, a psychedelic-punk niche sound influenced by Chrome, Blue Oyster Cult, Roky Erickson, just about anything off of the seminal *Nuggets* garage rock compilations and in no small part by the riffing of '60s instrumentalists Davie Allan and the Arrows.

"We were always too garage for the metal guys and too metal for the garage guys," says Forbidden Dimension main man, guitarist/vocalist/art director Tom Bagley (a.k.a. "Jackson Phibes," pictured above). "I kind of like that, though, it keeps it fresh. We don't have anything invested in it other than time and interest."

Bagley started the group back in 1988 with just his guitar, an effects pedal (to lend a strange, alien vibrato to his vocals), a drum machine and the most primitive of recording technology: a stereo tape deck and a ghetto blaster acting in place of a four-track recorder.

But from the get-go, the project found appeal in some quarters; Bagley's demo got picked up by a small label called Raging Records, and that led to the deal with Cargo.

Along the way, Bagley began building a proper band lineup – albeit one with somewhat of a revolving door quality, with band members such as "Bloody Holly," "Lars Bonfire," "Carl Pagan" and "Rudy Rue Morgue," culled from bands near (Calgary's Huevos Rancheros) and far (a bass player from AFI for a spell) rounding out the roster.

Regardless of what players are backing him (the current lineup features "PT Bonham" and "HP Lovesauce" – yes, these boys love their puns), Bagley has kept Forbidden Dimension dedicated to one form or another of classic genre material.

"I get on different kicks," he explains. "I like really old horror; when I started out I was just getting into movies like *Carnival of Souls* – it was just starting to be talked about again. Those old, black and white, off-Hollywood horror films. Also: pre-code horror comics, EC and their competitors, and just the weird feel that those things had and that's never been duplicated."

A talented illustrator whose macabre cartoon work has been commissioned for album sleeves by a variety of bands, including Chixdiggit, Man… or Astroman? and Arizona horror-punks Calabrese, Bagley's hyper-stylized doodles have always been as much a part of the package (quite literally) as his songs. As proof, *A Cool Sound Outta Hell* was released only on red vinyl (through the Saved By Vinyl label, appropriately) and it showcases Bagley's monster art not just on the front and back of the album cover, but on the inside record sleeve, as well. (The package also includes a code to download the digital version of the album.)

"It's always been very important to the band to make sure there's lot of artwork on the packages – the singles and CDs and stuff like that," he says. "The whole idea behind it was to do a horror-rock art project; it was kind of like my love of old horror imagery, which manifests itself in comic books, old movies, ghost trains at the fair – a lot of that stuff that influenced me when I was a little kid."

PLAY DEAD

GRAPHICS PLAYABILITY SHIVERS

HIGHEST RATING IS THREE.

GAMES REVIEWED BY ANDREW LEE



CONDEMNED 2: BLOODSHOT

PS3, Xbox 360

Monolith Productions

When society is falling apart and everyone around you is turning into a gibbering, homicidal maniac, you can either fight back or hide inside a whiskey bottle – or, in the case of *Condemned 2*'s forensic investigator/super-cop Ethan Thomas, do both.

Picking up shortly after the end of the original title (*RM#56*), the game once again has players lead Ethan into the decayed slums of the city to battle vicious vagrants and horrific hobos in a completely interactive environment. Here anything can become a weapon, and believe me, there's no greater feeling than picking up a bowling ball and smashing in some dirt-bag drifter's head or gashing his gonads with a golf club.

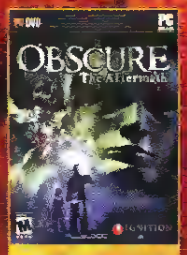
Players move through eleven different missions, including one where you must destroy a batch of nightmarish kamikaze wind-up dolls, in non-stop combat action that is halted only briefly while you utilize Ethan's impressive forensic skills to gather clues to solve the mystery of the madness that has gripped the city. Correctly identify the evidence and you may be rewarded with bonus items, such as brass knuckles or taser batteries that will help you zap attackers.

Although it's sometimes plagued by a clunky combat system and unimpressive AI, the frenzied multi-player levels with crazy missions (hide severed heads in coolers!) more than make up for it.

In addition, one of the most impressive elements of the first game was its incredibly spine-chilling soundtrack, which developers have improved to all new bowel-loosening levels. It's one of the most terrifying games of 2008 – adult diapers not included.







OBSCURE: THE AFTERMATH

PC, PS2, Wii

Playlogic International

Sometimes a generic game comes along that rides the wave of much better horror games, and this sequel to 2004's lacklustre *Obscure* (which didn't even warrant a review in this column) is definitely one of 'em.

Aftermath catches up with the six surviving teen slasher stereotypes from the first title, including the jock, the geek, the goth girl and the babe, who are now attending university. Here they face a whole new nightmare in the form of, I shit you not, deadly flowers.

Gameplay sees you solving a handful of mindless puzzles and battling laughable monsters that look like rejects from *Resident Evil* while slipping between reality and a nightmare world plucked right out of the *Silent Hill* series – thanks to some mysterious black flowers that have popped up all over the place. Though the new multi-player co-op feature is a welcome addition, ultimately it fails to measure up to the titles it ripped off.



REQUIEM: BLOODYMARE

PC

Gravity Interactive

The world of MMORPGs (massively multiplayer online role-playing games) has been dominated by fantasy and sci-fi titles such as *World of Warcraft* and *Star Wars Galaxies*, while genre fans have been left in the dark. But that has ended now that *Requiem: Bloodymare* hit the shelves, offering horror fans a mature gaming experience dripping with gore and featuring gruesome graphics that look as if they were culled from the combined nightmares of Clive Barker and H.R. Giger.

Players choose their characters and develop their skills in frenetic melee skirmishes and magical combat as they wander through a vast alien world polluted with creatures spawned from centuries of genetic and magical engineering. Winning battles increases skill levels and earns power-ups that can be used to improve weapons and armour.

Just remember, before you let little Billy or Sally tackle this title, it is an adult-themed game, which means, oh yes, there will be blood... (and boobs).

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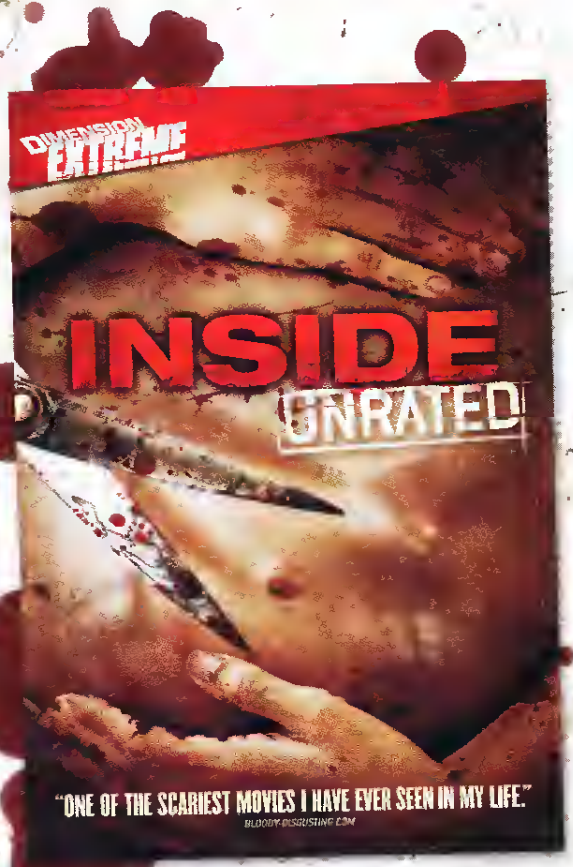
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If you were a child of the 1980s, one particular television commercial might have captured your attention. Narrated by the dulcet tones of Vincent Price, it dared you to enter a world where nothing was as it seemed, where "Each volume brings to life so vividly those inhabitants of the other world: witches and wizards, ghosts, goblins and avenging knights."

Time-Life's *Enchanted World* was a series of 21 beautifully bound books, each focussing on a different aspect of mythology. From the ancient Babylonian story of Gilgamesh (*Legends of Valor*), to Arabic tales of vengeance (*Magical Justice*), to Ragnarok itself (*Gods and Goddesses*), the series was known for its effective prose combined with beautifully rendered art from the likes of John Howe (*The Lord of the Rings*), 16th-century artist Pieter Bruegel (*Triumph of Death*) and daring 18th-century painter Henry Fuseli (*The Nightmare*), among many others. Far from scholarly treatises, these books were geared towards a general audience, and for many it was their first exposure to the world of myth.



What made the presentation unique was that the books were written as taking place in an *in situ* universe. This was an alternate history of the world that was fraught with magic, mystery and monsters. Like the '70s television series *In Search Of* that preceded and inspired it, *The Enchanted World* never treated these stories as "stories," but as a history of mankind as told through tales spun since its very beginnings.

While the darker side showed its hand in volumes such as *Wizards and Witches* and *Water Creatures*, three books in particular turned their focus on the truly horrific. Possibly the most famous installment of the entire series was *Ghosts*. Common legends of banshees and hell-hounds resided alongside the lesser-known spectral Ankou (a pale Death-like figure driving a cart of the dead through France's Brittany region while on its eternal hunt for souls). Mixing likely fictions (Screaming Skulls) with true historical events (The Black Death) this dark material lent *Ghosts* a weight few other volumes in the series possessed, and made for chilling late-night reading.

Night Creatures, the sixth volume in the series, ventured into shadowy expanses populated by vampires, were-beasts and other long-feared denizens of the twilight lands. It differed substantially from *Ghosts* in that it moved from a Euro-centric focus to a global one. Here, Arabic vampires co-mingled with Japanese spider-demons, and Chinese fox maidens hunted alongside the more traditional werewolves of Transylvania. *Night Creatures* more than ably demonstrated that many beasts were truly universal monsters.

As the series neared the end of its run, there was one final jolt, in *Tales of Terror*. By now, *Enchanted World*'s popularity was on the wane and the overall format had shifted from the continuous *in situ* narrative to more specifically segmented stories. But this particular volume contained the most hair-raising tales of the entire run, and also marked yet another change in focus for the books. This time the series hit close to home, exploring its target audience's turf in North America, confronting it with unearthly cannibals and frozen corpse children of Inuit legend, plus an unholy marriage of mortals and the dead in the Pacific Northwest. Here the readers were exposed to particularly macabre tales, spun to keep the darker sides of human nature at bay.



The Enchanted World – with its campy Vincent Price commercials, mass market availability and largely fantasy-based content – was as an unexpected mainstream gateway to horror for readers who received the series' darker installments. Its postmodern hybrid of fantasy and reality, folklore and history also helped pave the way for the resurgence in popularity of the strange, unusual and unexplained. *The Enchanted World*'s success resulted in the publication of Time-Life's immensely popular *Mysteries of the Unknown* series, and its influence can even be traced to recent television shows such as *Ghost Hunters*, A&E's *Paranormal State*, TLC's *A Haunting* and countless internet websites that re-position fiction as fact. *The Enchanted World* was a genuine trailblazer when it came to capturing the public's appetite for frightening folklore and supernatural causes for the unexplained – an "enchanted world, where anything is possible. . . ."

Brad Abraham



An interior illustration from ***The Enchanted World: Tales of Terror.***



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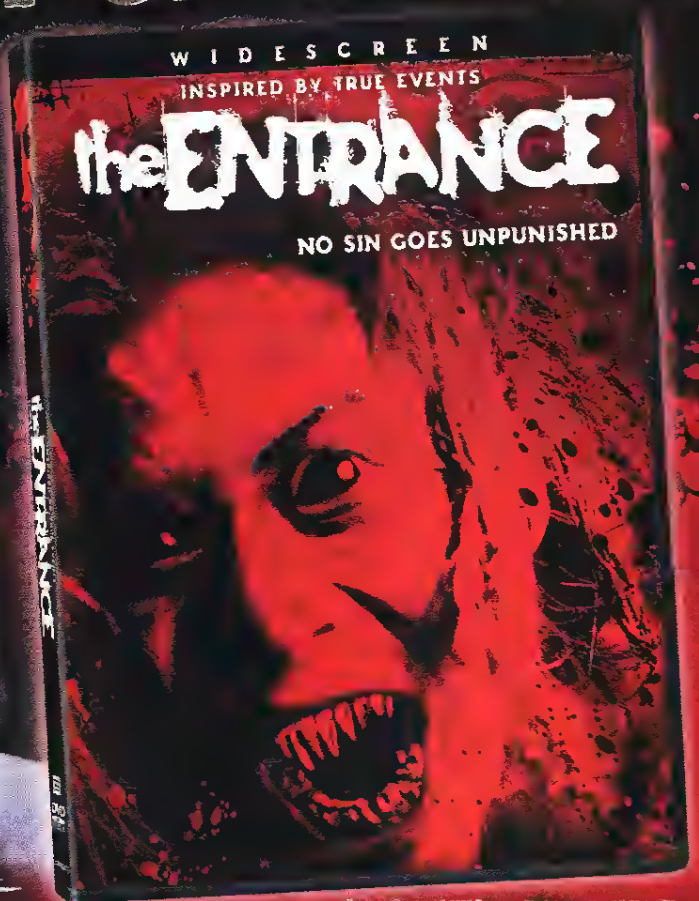
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